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GRIFFITH

HER ALIBI

a screenplay by

Charlie Peters

draft
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Producer: Keith Barish

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - EAST VILLAGE - DAY

NINA, a beautiful 25 year old, and her younger sister, PETRA argue in both English and a foreign language, alternating between the two.

PETRA
Please don't do it, Nina.

NINA
We agreed. Go.

PETRA
They'll send you to prison.

NINA
It's a risk I must take. Now go back.

PETRA
No.

Nina grabs her sister by the shoulders and speaks forcefully.

NINA
I can take care of myself, Petra. If I don't go, they will expose all of us. It's better this way. For the family.

Nina turns and looks at a particular building.

NINA
Don't come any farther. They'll see you.

PETRA
(hugs Nina)
I love you.

NINA
I love you, too. Give this to mother and father.
(hands her a letter)
Now forget me.

She walks nervously to the building, up the stoop and enters.

INT. HALLWAY OF BUILDING - DAY

Nina approaches a door. It is slightly ajar. She waits a moment then pushes the door open.

INT. APARTMENT

The apartment is full of COPS. They all turn to Nina. A heavy, MIDDLE AGED LADY points to Nina excitedly.

LADY
That's her! She's the one I saw running away. That's the one!

INT. APARTMENT - MINUTES LATER

A COP reads Nina her rights.

COP #2
You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to call a lawyer -

On the floor of the apartment is the white forensic outline of a body. Nina stares blankly ahead as she is handcuffed and mirandized.

LADY
I heard fighting. Things breaking. I been a landlady a long time and I never heard nothing like that. Never. Who's gonna pay? I ask you that. Who?

The Cops lead Nina from the apartment.

EXT. FRONT OF BUILDING - DAY

As the Cops take her into a patrol car, Nina spots her sister staring sadly at her from across the street. The Cops put Nina into the car and close the door. She looks out the window at her sister as she is driven away.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - MORNING

PHIL BLACKWELL, a nice looking writer in his late 30's, early 40's, and his editor, SAM DUSEN, about 50, stare at a pretty WAITRESS.

SAM
Ask her out.

PHIL
I'm not gonna ask her out.

(CONTINUED)

SAM
She's hot for you.

PHIL
She's not hot for me, Sam. I'm sick of you married guys living your fantasies through us single men. You want every woman to be hot for us because you want them to be hot for you.

SAM
Sleep with her and take notes. Call it research.

PHIL
Grow up.

SAM
Okay. She's not hot for you.
(takes out papers)
Let's talk about these.

PHIL
(beat)
Why do you think she's hot for me?

SAM
I got a second sense about these things.

PHIL
(looks, decides not)
Nah.

SAM
(refers to pages)
We got a problem here, Phil.

PHIL
What?

SAM
I'm not gonna beat around the bush. You come out with three best selling mysteries in a row. Astronomical paper royalties. Big movie deals. You're the biggest thing since Edgar Allen Poe.

PHIL
He died penniless.

SAM
Exactly. Now the last three years: nothing but travel stories, mediocre stuff. I've been very patient, Phil. But the public has a very short memory. Very fickle. You need a hot book and you need it now.

PHIL
You didn't like the new chapters.

SAM
They're alright. But they're not special. Not like your old stuff.

PHIL
You think I don't know that? I live with it. I'm in a rut that gets deeper every day. Face it, I'm washed up.

SAM
You're not washed up. You need a change. That's all. Travel. Get sick. Fall in love.

PHIL
Yeah, right.

SAM
Buy a car.

PHIL
I have a car.

SAM
That crate? Buy yourself a driving machine.

PHIL
What are you talking about? A driving machine.

SAM
A Porsche. A Ferrari.

PHIL
Look, you want a Ferrari, you buy a Ferrari. I told you I'm not living your fantasies.

SAM
Then live your own.

PHIL
I need inspiration.

SAM
Look at last year's tax return.

PHIL
I can't come up with anything original. My characters, my plots are old, tired. I'm burnt out.

SAM
Get married. You'll think of crimes you never knew existed.

The Waitress bends to clear a nearby table, her attractive figure taking their interest.

SAM
That's what you need.

PHIL
I need a new story.

SAM
You're still hung up on Susan, aren't you?

PHIL
What do you mean?

SAM
Don't play dumb with me. I'm your friend, remember? I've know you for fifteen years. I see it. Every time you go out with a lady, every time you get a little bit close to them, the ghost of Susan rises up and pushes you back into your lonely little dungeon. She was a great lady, you loved her, she died. But you're still alive.

Phil considers this. He knows it's true. The Waitress comes to their table. Phil picks up the book, with his picture on the back cover. He decides to flirt.

PHIL
Hi. My name's Phil. I wrote this.

The Waitress looks at him with a sneer.

WAITRESS
Mine's Karen. I wrote this.

She slaps his check onto the table and walks away. Sam shakes his head.

SAM
Yesterday's papers.

INT. ROOM - DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

Nina is questioned by an Assistant D.A., CRAIG FARRELL. Also present are a Public Defender, EUGENE KLEIN, and a representative from the Romanian Embassy, MR. PETROV.

KLEIN
She has a valid student visa.

FARRELL
(to Nina)
We want to help you.

Nina looks blankly at him.

FARRELL
(to Petrov)
Translate. Tell her that we have no extradition agreement with her country and that unless we can work something out we'll have to try her here on murder charges.

Petrov translates. Nina responds to Petrov. They seem to break out into an argument as Nina snaps at Petrov and he snaps back. The others in the room are aware that more than what Farrell said is being talked about, argued about. Nina ends with a sharp retort to Petrov and spits in his face.

PETROV
(wipes his face)
She has nothing to say.

A GUARD leads Nina from the room past Farrell and Klein.

FARRELL
(to Klein; re Nina)
I wouldn't want to cross her.

EXT. NEW YORK COURTHOUSE - DAY

Establishing shot of the imposing landmark.

INT. COURT - DAY

The place is busy as PROSECUTORS and defense ATTORNEYS shuttle clients back and forth to the JUDGE for arraignment.

INT. REAR GALLERY

In the rear of the room is the public gallery. In one section of the gallery sit a group of elderly men and women known as the "COURT OWLS" or "RAIL BIRDS". Retirees, their new "profession" is to study the cases that come through this court. Their knowledge of the law is astounding but their real edge is their human perspective on it. ROSE, MILLIE, OLIVER and F.X. eat and talk.

OLIVER
What kind of a plea did Haberman cop?

ROSE
Grand theft auto.

F.X.
He got off easy.
(looks into lunch bag)
What did you bring?

OLIVER
What do you think the public defender will bargain for on the Rubenstein case?

MILLIE
Entrapment. Open and shut.

F.X.
It's not entrapment.
(sniffs a sandwich)
What is this?

OLIVER
Turkey salami.

F.X.
Turkey salami. There's a contradiction in terms.

ROSE
It's the same m.o. as in the Greenfield case.

A young assistant public defender JOHN GOODHOLD approaches.

JOHN
Hello, Rose. Millie. Guys.

(CONTINUED)

OLIVER
What can we do for you, Johnnie?

JOHN
You know the Stanley case?

ROSE
In detail.

JOHN
Ralph wants to enter a plea of manslaughter one. He asked my opinion.
(grows nervous)
I want to say the right thing. This is real important to me. I make the wrong suggestion and it'll cloud the rest of my career around here. You think Ralph's right? Manslaughter one?

MILLIE
No.

JOHN
No?

F.X.
Judge Saul is presiding.

JOHN
So?

OLIVER
"Free 'Em All Saul" is what they call him.

MILLIE
Old knee jerk liberal. Thinks FDR was the Messiah.

ROSE
And he hates the D.A.'s man, Libertini. Make Saul aware of the gray areas, of which there are many, milk the racial issues, and he'll have some big problems with them.

JOHN
So what do I tell Ralph I decided on?

MILLIE
Manslaughter with special circumstances.

JOHN
You think so?

They all wisely nod their heads "yes".

JOHN
Thanks, guys.

ROSE
And get your client a haircut.

JOHN
I will. This is a great system, isn't it?

He exits, passing Phil who seems to know everyone in the room.

JOHN
Hey, Phil.

PHIL
How's it going, Johnnie?

Phil shakes hands with a Court Guard and sits among the Owls.

OLIVER
We saved your seat, Phil.

MILLIE
You look tired, Phillip. Are you eating enough?

F.X.
Have some turkey salami.

PHIL
(to Rose)
Did you read my new chapters?
(Rose nods)
What did you think?

ROSE
(shrugs)
Eh.

OLIVER
She's a philistine.

PHIL
No. She's right. They're terrible. I'm going back to advertising.
(beat)
What happened with Felix the Cat?

F.X.
He was aquitted.

PHIL
You're kidding.

ROSE
He's guilty.

F.X.
A jury of his peers said he was innocent.

ROSE
That animal has no peers.

PHIL
Rose is never wrong, you guys.

ROSE
Guilty.

INT. SAME - A SHORT TIME LATER

Phil sits among the Owls who argue among themselves. In his notebook, he's doodling, bored, distracted. He gets up.

PHIL
This is getting me nowhere. I'm going home.

MILLIE
Get some sleep.

OLIVER
Get laid.

Phil starts to walk out of the room when a Court Officer leads Nina past him. The bump into each other and Nina knocks the notebook out of his hand. Phil and Nina make eye contact.

NINA
I'm sorry.

CONTINUED:

Phil is frozen. Stunned by Nina's beauty, he can't answer. He stares as she's led toward the Judge. He makes his way quickly back to the Owls.

PHIL
Who's that?

MILLIE
The foreign girl Farrell told us about.

PHIL
What'd he say about her?

F.X.
They don't know. She doesn't speak English.

PHIL
She spoke English to me.

F.X.
She killed a politician.

MILLIE
Imagine that being a crime?

ROSE
She shot a diplomat.

PHIL
Her?

OLIVER
The Romanian embassy's washing their hands of her. The D.A.'s gonna prosecute.

PHIL
How could she kill anybody?

MILLIE
Single shot. Thirty eight. Once through the heart.

INT. JUDGE'S BENCH - POV PHIL

We see Nina in front of the Judge. Her face appears radiant, angelic, exquisite and fearful. She's the kind of woman who melts men's hearts in a moment.

PHIL (O.S.)
Did she confess?

INT. GALLERY

Phil stares at her, totally smitten.

MILLIE
No. But they figure they got her nailed for murder 3 at least.

PHIL
She'll go to prison.

F.X.
One of the drawbacks in killing someone.

PHIL
She didn't kill anybody.

MILLIE
How do you know?

PHIL
Look at her, for Christ's sake!

OLIVER
Nice looking girl.

PHIL
It's not that. Jesus. It's just I can tell. She's innocent.
(looks to Rose)
Isn't she? Rose?

Rose can't make a decision yet. She shrugs. Phil watches as Nina is led out of the room by an Officer. He quickly gets up and tries to leave the room through the same door. A Guard grabs Phil.

GUARD
Where you going?

The SECOND GUARD, who knows Phil, interrupts.

GUARD #2
It's okay, Barry.

Phil smiles his thanks to Guard #2 and goes through the door.

INT. HALLWAY

A confusion of lawyers, prosecutors, guards, criminals. Phil spots Craig Farrell and claws his way to him.

PHIL
Craig.

(CONTINUED)

FARRELL
Phil, hi. Hell of a day. You wouldn't believe it.

PHIL
About that girl.

FARRELL
What girl?
(to other Man)
Where's Howie?
(looks around)
Shit!

PHIL
The foreign girl.

FARRELL
Her? Pain in the ass. Morgenthau doesn't know what to do with her. She kills a U.N. employee of a foreign country on U.S. soil, New York soil naturally, and her embassy doesn't want to know about her. Last thing we fucking need. With the Hertzog case ready to go.

PHIL
Did she do it?

FARRELL
I think so. But then what the fuck do I know?
(to Guard)
When are we due?

GUARD
(consulting list)
You're on.

FARRELL
It's showtime, Phil. Ciao.

Farrell leaves. Phil looks down to the end of the hall where he can see Nina speaking to a PRIEST. Phil moves near the Priest, listening as he speaks to an Assistant D.A.

PRIEST
That girl wants me to hear her confession tomorrow. Who do I clear that with?

ASS'T. D.A.
Jack Greene. Detention.

Phil notes this. He watches Nina disappear through the door.

INT. POLICE STATION - AFTERNOON

Phil talks to LT. HAROLD FRANK, a dapper, Black New York cop who's seen everything. He's fond of Phil despite the fact he teases him mercilessly. They walk down a corridor.

FRANK
What is she to you?

PHIL
I'm interested, that's all.

FRANK
What are you gonna do? Write a book about her?

PHIL
Maybe.

FRANK
Another one of your white glove crime stories?

PHIL
Don't give me that shit, Frank.

FRANK
Why don't you spend a couple of days here with me? It'll take the elitism out of your books.

PHIL
She looks scared.

FRANK
She should. She killed a guy.

PHIL
How do you know?

FRANK
How do I know anything? Evidence.

PHIL
What evidence?

FRANK
We got a witness.

CONTINUED:

PHIL
Circumstantial at best.

Another cop, MIKE RUSSO, speaks to Frank.

MIKE
Frank, we need another dummy for the lineup.

FRANK
Come on, Phil. People saw her. The landlady saw her running from the room with a gun in her hand.

PHIL
So what?

INT. LINEUP ROOM

Frank, Mike and a YOUNG WOMAN sit in a small auditorium looking at a lineup of men behind a one way glass.

MIKE
Take your time, Mrs. Howell. Don't worry. They can't see you.

INT. LINEUP

We SCAN the lineup. The first five MEN are rough looking characters. The sixth is Phil, very much out of place, who looks at the five men to his left and makes a motion toward Frank behind the glass like "What am I doing here?".

PHIL
He's gotta be kidding.

MIKE
(over microphone)
Number six, please stand still.

The THUG next to Phil stares at him harshly. Mrs. Howell, looks from man to man and finally points to Phil.

MRS. HOWELL
Him. Number six. I'm sure of it.

Frank breaks out in a wide grin.

EXT. POLICE STATION

Frank, still amused, walks Phil out.

PHIL
You see what an eyewitness is good for? Nothing.

FRANK
Maybe you're right. Than again, maybe you did rob the lady's laundromat. What were you doing last Thursday?

PHIL
Screw you.

FRANK
Stay in your ivory tower, Phil. Forget the James Gang. You just keep writing about the Brooks Brothers.

INT. PARTY - THAT NIGHT

A cocktail party for a just-published book, attended by a chic Manhattan publishing crowd. Phil's surrounded by people. But he's distant, distracted.

JACK
I don't know. Sometimes I want to screw every one of The Solid Gold Dancers and be the subject of a Dewar's profile. Then the next minute I want to have a baby.

BRUCE
Men have biological clocks, too. Ours don't tick, though. They're digital.

PHIL
I saw this woman, today. She stunned me. Like nothing else.

A WOMAN greets Phil with a kiss on the cheek.

WOMAN
The most eligible bachelor in town and he's so skinny, too. Isn't he skinny?
(to Phil)
How do you do it?

(CONTINUED)

PHIL
I have a terminal blood disease.

WOMAN
(not listening)
You're so lucky.

PHIL
Excuse me.

He walks away from them.

INT. NINA - FLASHBACK

We see Nina in the courtroom as Phil first saw her.

EXT. U.N. BUILDING - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING SHOT

INT. OFFICE IN U.N. - NIGHT

A small office in the U.N. building. In it are four men, including Petrov, who we saw earlier. The others are GRUNDIG, KALCHOV and the apparent main man, FENCIK.

PETROV
She won't talk.

KALCHOV
She's scared what will happen to her family if she does. These gypsies are tough. Like getting blood from a stone.

GRUNDIG
They'll convict her. She'll get no less than 8 years.

FENCIK
What if she goes free?

KALCHOV
She won't.

FENCIK
I don't trust the legal system here.

GRUNDIG
What can happen?

CONTINUED:

FENCIK
She saw me. She saw Yuri. Him I don't care so much about but she knows I'm involved. If she points us out to the others, this whole thing could fall apart. Do you know what would happen to us if we were exposed?

GRUNDIG
She won't talk.

FENCIK
Let's pray she doesn't. If she goes free it would be bad for all of us.

INT. PHIL'S HOME - NIGHT

At the desk in his study, where he writes Phil takes the cover off his typewriter. Alot of DUST rises from it. He inserts a clean piece of paper and begins to type excitedly.

PHIL (V.O.)
He first saw her amidst the rabble of the courtroom. She had the face of an angel, like the Madonna of a medieval fresco. She was Joan of Arc before the stake. One look at her and he knew in his heart she was innocent.
(he pauses)
He wondered what her breasts looked like.

EXT. HOUSE OF DETENTION - MORNING

Phil walks in with Frank, who shows credentials to a Guard.

FRANK
He's my guest.

Once he gets past the guard desk, Phil stops.

PHIL
I'm not feeling so good. I think I'll take a rain check on this.

FRANK
What's the matter? Real crime too much for the Ivy League boy? Call me later. We'll have dinner.

Frank walks on. Phil enters the Men's Room.

INT. MEN'S ROOM

Phil puts on a priest's collar and arranges his jacket so that he looks like a priest.

EXT. MEN'S ROOM

Phil exits the Men's room. A WOMAN passes.

WOMAN
Good morning, father.

Phil nods to her and walks down a corridor.

INT. HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

A sign points to WOMEN'S CORRECTIONS UNIT. Phil musters his courage and approaches a Guard Desk.

PHIL
I'm Father Murphy. I'm here for a confession.

GUARD
What did you do?

PHIL
(tense)
What?

GUARD
(laughs)
Just kidding, father.

PHIL
(laughs)
Very funny.

GUARD
(points)
Through there. Ask for Mrs. Hyatt.

PHIL
Thank you.
(sotto)
Moron.

INT. CORRECTIONS UNIT - MINUTES LATER

Phil follows MRS. HYATT who points to a door.

MRS. HYATT
Right in there, father.

PHIL
Thank you.

Phil makes a clumsy cross with his hand and enters the room.

INT. SMALL ROOM

There's a table, two chairs and a hanging lamp. Phil paces nervously, waiting for Nina. Finally she enters. Phil stares at her, still smitten.

PHIL
I'm to hear your confession.

Phil is confused as what to do. He moves a chair.

PHIL
How should we - ?

Nina takes the initiative and arranges the chairs so that they're facing each other without the table in between.

NINA
This is the easiest way.

PHIL
You do speak English.

NINA
Yes.

Phil stares at her, smitten.

PHIL
You're very beautiful.
(takes)
I mean your soul is beautiful.
I never met a soul I didn't like.
Shall we begin?

NINA
(makes sign of the cross)
Bless me, father, I have sinned.

PHIL
Good. Go on.

(CONTINUED)

Nina's amused a little by this odd priest.

NINA
I lied.

PHIL
About what?

NINA
About my speaking English.

PHIL
That's okay. Keep going.

NINA
I stole. Three times.

PHIL
(hurrying her)
No problem. Keep going.

NINA
I lied to my parents.

PHIL
About what?

NINA
It was for their own good.

PHIL
(becoming more at ease)
I used to do that, too. Of course my parents never saw it like that. This one time I took my father's car out and ran it into a guard rail. He was so pissed off he
-

Phil realizes he's rattling on. Nina watches him with interest. Phil stops.

PHIL
I'm sorry. Go on.

NINA
I had impure thoughts.

PHIL
You did? Really? I never believe it when women tell me that.
(then more seriously)
Were they thoughts of anyone in particular?

NINA
I don't understand.

PHIL
I mean was it just random lust?
Or are you having impure thoughts
with someone on a steady basis?

NINA
No.

PHIL
Great.

NINA
Worst of all -

PHIL
(is this the bad news?)
What?

NINA
I despaired.

PHIL
You despaired?

NINA
Over my situation.

PHIL
Could you be more specific?

NINA
I lost faith that God will take
care of me.
(pause)
That's all.

PHIL
That's it?
(Nina nods)
Nothing else you want to tell me?

NINA
No.

PHIL
Are you sure? Take your time.
You didn't cheat at cards. Or
drink too much?
(beat)
Or murder anybody?

Nina looks up quickly to him and stares hard at him.

NINA
I did not commit the sin of murder.

PHIL
I believe you.

NINA
I could not lie before God.

PHIL
(very relieved)
That's right. You couldn't, could you? I can't tell you how happy that makes me. You're forgiven.

NINA
Aren't you going to give me penance?

PHIL
Penance? Right. Penance for your sins. I was getting to that. Say twenty minutes of prayers.

Nina kneels and, crossing herself, says a short prayer. Phil stares hard at her. She gets up and he knocks over his chair, nervously.

NINA
Thank you.

PHIL
Can I see you again?

NINA
(smiles)
When I've sinned.

PHIL
Right. When you've sinned. I don't want to keep you then. Goodbye.

She leaves the room. He watches, breathing heavily, confused.

INT. COURT ROOM GALLERY - DAY

Phil enters the Court Gallery quickly. He approaches Rose.

PHIL
Rose. I've gotta talk to you.

He takes Rose aside.

PHIL
That girl we saw yesterday. The Romanian. I need to know something. What do you think? Is she guilty?

ROSE
(shakes her head)
I don't know.

PHIL
Are you sure? It's very important to me.

ROSE
(shrugs)
Too early to tell.

She walks back to the others. Phil exits quickly.

INT. PRISON CORRIDOR - DAY

PHIL (V.O.)
He decided to go ahead with his plan. It was mad and he knew it.

A GUARD leads Nina through the corridor. They come to a door and the Guard opens it for Nina to enter.

GUARD
In here.

INT. VISITOR'S ROOM

Nina's led into the room. She sees Phil, without his bogus Roman collar. He stands and waits for Nina to sit. She is confused, surprised to see him.

NINA
Father?

PHIL
It's my turn to confess.
(beat)
I'm not a priest.

(CONTINUED)

Nina's upset. Her temper suddenly flares.

NINA
You work for the police.

PHIL
No, I don't.

NINA
Who do you work for then? The Romanians?

PHIL
I don't work for anybody.

NINA
(starts to leave)
I don't believe you.

PHIL
I believe you. Please believe me.

NINA
(stops; turns to him)
I don't understand.

PHIL
I was in court when you were arraigned. Don't ask me why but I know you're innocent. I want to help you.

NINA
How?

PHIL
I can give you an alibi. I'm a very respected figure. The evidence against you is weak. If I tell them that you and I were - are - having an affair and that you were with me the whole week of the crime, they'd believe me. They'd have to.

She stares hard at him. This makes him nervous.

NINA
You know nothing about this.

PHIL
I don't care.

NINA
Why are you doing it?

PHIL
Because I - I don't know why. But I'm your only hope. Without me, my alibi, they'll appoint some public defender who'll have you at Riker's Island before you know it.

NINA
What do you want?

PHIL
Nothing. Only if we say we were having an affair it'd probably be best, for a little while at least, to spend some time together. To make it seem credible.

NINA
Do you want sex?

PHIL
No, no! God, no. Nothing like that.

NINA
What then? Love?

PHIL
Well, I mean, if that happened I'm not one to slam the door in love's face. That was a stupid thing to say, I'm sorry. I'm usually very sophisticated. I don't say things like that. But you make me nervous. Look, I'm not the greatest guy in the world. But I have my good points. I'm smart. I'm well off. And I can help you.
(beat)
All I want is a chance to know you.

NINA
You're a sweet man.

PHIL
I am. Yes. That's another one of my good points.

NINA
If I say yes, you must agree to a condition of mine.

PHIL
What?

NINA
That you don't ask about my life. That you know only what I tell you about me.

PHIL
That sounds fair.

NINA
That's all I ask. Never to go into my past. Do you promise?

PHIL
I promise.

There's a moment between them.

NINA
I did nothing wrong.

PHIL
I believe you.

NINA
What is the alibi?

INT. D.A.'S OFFICES - DAY

Present are Phil, Farrell, Frank and another of the D.A.'s underlings, SCHMIDT. While the D.A.'s men confer, Frank speaks to Phil aside.

FRANK
You know the penalty for perjury?

PHIL
It's not perjury.

FRANK
You're going too far this time.

FARRELL
Morgenthau would be more than happy to wash his hands of this whole fucking case.
(more)

FARRELL (Cont'd)
(holds paper)
You stand by this story, Phil?

Phil nods. Frank's disgusted. HARRIS, another of the D.A.'s staff enters and speaks to Farrell.

FARRELL
Wait here.

They leave Frank and Phil alone.

FRANK
You're out of your mind.

PHIL
We had an affair. She was with me the whole week.

FRANK
How come you never told me about her?

PHIL
I don't tell you every time I have dinner with a woman.

FRANK
Like hell you don't! You always call me the next morning crying about how they're real nice and pretty but that they're not Susan and nobody will be and yada yada.

PHIL
I was with her!

FRANK
You don't know what you're getting into. What if she's guilty?

PHIL
She's not.

SAM
But what if she is? Consider the position that puts you in.

PHIL
What position?

SAM
You're the goddamned mystery maven. You figure it out. If she's not a murderer, then fine. Hunky dory. Ain't life grand? But if she is a murderer, there's only one thing standing between her and total freedom.

PHIL
What?

FRANK
You, asshole! Think about it. While you're alive, there's always a chance that you could recind this alibi shit and send her back to jail. She knows that. But if you die before you recind your alibi, it'd stand forever. Her freedom would be virtually guaranteed. By your death.

PHIL
(thinks on this before proclaiming:)
She's innocent.

Farrell and the others come back into the room.

FARRELL
The girl's story matches.
(to Phil)
You stand by this, Phil?

PHIL
(he looks at Frank)
Yes.

FARRELL
Morgenthau says okay.

PHIL
That's it?

FARRELL
We got some paper work to do but, by and large, that's it.
(to his Aides)
Score one for justice, guys.
Next!

Phil smiles nervously as Frank shakes his head.

FRANK
Shit.

INT. DETENTION CENTER - DAY

Nina's processed to leave prison. She has her belongings in a small valise. She walks with a GUARD. She's nervous.

INT. LOBBY OF DETENTION CENTER - AFTERNOON

Phil, flowers in hand, waits nervously for Nina. He spots her coming out the door, handing a pass to the Guard. Phil walks up to her.

PHIL
Hi.

NINA
Hello.

PHIL
(hands her flowers)
These are for you.

NINA
(a charming smile)
Thank you.

PHIL
My car's out front.

They head toward the exit but there seems to be some commotion in the lobby. People are pointing and yelling. A small bird is trapped in the room, flying scared.

NINA
It's caught in here.

Finally, the small bird flies into a glass door and injures itself. It lands right in front of Phil and Nina. Nina bends down and picks up the shaking creature.

NINA
It's wing is broken. It won't live.

With one quick motion she snaps its neck, putting the tiny bird out of its misery. She places it in a sand-filled ashtray and walks toward the door. Phil, surprised by the thorough coolness of her action, stares at the dead bird for a moment. Ashes from a cigarette fall onto it and Phil looks up. Frank grins at him.

FRANK
Rest in peace.

Phil leaves to catch up with Nina.

INT. U.N. MISSION OFFICE - DAY

Fencik, Grundig, Petrov.

FENCIK
Who is he?

GRUNDIG
He writes popular rubbish.

FENCIK
Find out how much he knows. If he's involved with her family. We must watch her. As long as she stays apart from her family and the others here at the mission, she can't identify us to them. We're safe.

PETROV
What if she goes to them?

FENCIK
She won't. Not right away. She knows we'll be waiting for that. We can wait as long as she can.

GRUNDIG
What about this writer?

FENCIK
(laughs)
I would not like to be in his shoes.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Phil drives Nina to his home in Connecticut. Phil looks at her from time to time. Nina is interested in everything, like a child. The mood is awkward.

NINA
This is a nice car.

PHIL
I was thinking of trading it in. Getting myself a driving machine.

NINA
Doesn't this machine drive?

PHIL
Sure. But it's not a driving machine.

(CONTINUED)

NINA
I think it suits you.
(pause)
Are you sorry about this?

PHIL
No. Not at all. Of course this isn't how I usually meet someone. My wife - she died a few years ago - we met at a polyester party. Everybody had to come dressed in polyester. I went as Earl Scheib.
(beat)
I'll explain it another time.

They drive on.

EXT. PHIL'S HOUSE - A LITTLE LATER

Phil's car pulls up in front of a pretty suburban house.

PHIL
Home sweet home.

NINA
It's beautiful.

They enter the house.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Phil shows Nina her room, a bedroom on the second floor.

PHIL
This is your room.

NINA
It's lovely.

PHIL
Closets. Wooden hangars. The bathroom's down here.
(points to a hall door)
Sink, mirror, toilet, running water. Everything you ever wanted to know about personal hygiene.

She smells one of the many bouquets of flowers.

PHIL
I went a little overboard with the flowers.

CONTINUED:

NINA
I love flowers.

PHIL
I grew most of them myself.

NINA
They're beautiful.

PHIL
My room's just down here in case you need anything. You know, extra hangers, change of underwear.
(to himself)
Passion.

He backs out of the room awkwardly, bumping into furniture.

INT. PHIL'S STUDY - SHORT TIME LATER

The room where Phil writes. He's writing now.

PHIL (V.O.)
He couldn't believe he'd actually gone through with it. He'd never done anything like it before. She was in his home now. He was excited but nervous. He felt he was on a bizarre blind date.

He hears something and turns. Nina stands at the door, leafing through a copy of Playboy Magazine. Phil closes his notebook quickly and grabs the magazine from Nina's hand.

PHIL
Research. Terrific interviews.

He throws the magazines across the room.

PHIL
Hungry?

NINA
I started supper.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Phil and Nina eat supper. Awkward silence.

PHIL
You're a wonderful cook. I didn't even know I had this stuff in my kitchen.
(pause)
Can I ask you a question?

NINA
Yes.

PHIL
Are you married?

NINA
I was.

PHIL
Where's your husband?

NINA
He's dead.

PHIL
Ah.
(pause)
And your family?

NINA
They're here.

PHIL
In America?

NINA
Yes.

PHIL
Don't you want to see them?

NINA
Very much. But I can't.

PHIL
I don't understand.

NINA
I've said too much already. Remember your promise. Nothing about my past.
(gets up)
I'll clean up.

INT. KITCHEN - SHORT TIME LATER

Nina washes up. Phil stands at the doorway of the kitchen watching her rinse dishes. Suddenly Nina stops and spots something crawling on the wall across the room.

INT. WALL - CLOSEUP

A large BEETLE scurries up the wall and stops.

INT. NINA

Nina's reaction is instinctive. She grabs a large carving knife and throws it quickly at the insect with confidence. The large knife hits the beetle squarely in the back, nailing it to the wall.

INT. PHIL

Phil, amazed by this, speaks up.

PHIL
Jesus!

Nina turns and sees him there. She calmly plucks the knife from the wall and wipes the dead bug off its sharp tip.

NINA
I don't like bugs.

PHIL
Neither do I. But I usually scream and hit them with a rolled-up copy of Sports Illustrated. How did you do that?

NINA
Instinct I guess.
(Phil's not convinced)
I'm going to bathe.

She leaves. Phil stares after her.

INT. KITCHEN - SHORT TIME LATER

Phil stands at the kitchen table with every knife he owns lying in front of him. He throws each one at a paper target he's tacked to the wall. He's terrible at this. He jumps away as the knives bounce off the wall and ricochet in every direction.

One knife finally sticks into the wall. Phil seems relieved. Beat. The phone rings. Phil jumps a mile.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL
JESUS CHRIST!
(answers it)
Hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Frank's on the phone in his office.

FRANK
Still alive?

PHIL
Piss off.

FRANK
Just checking.

PHIL
I'm very much alive, thank you.

FRANK
Did she confess?

PHIL
Did you call for any other reason
than to annoy me?

FRANK
No.

PHIL
Then I'm going to bed, Frank.

FRANK
Alone?

PHIL
Yes, alone.

FRANK
Got a good lock on your bedroom
door?

PHIL
Screw you.

Frank laughs. Phil hangs up.

INT. PHIL'S BEDROOM - LATER

Phil, in his pyjamas, lies in bed, writing in a notebook.

PHIL (V.O.)
She was an enigma. Half child, half woman. What if his cop friend was right? What if she was a murderess and he was the only thing standing in the way of her unquestioned freedom?

He hears a noise outside his door. Stops writing. Listens. Nothing. He writes again.

PHIL (V.O.)
Do any of us ever really know the person we fall in love with? Isn't that part of the allure? The mystery? Who was this Nina? Why was he so drawn to her? What time of day did she like making love best?

Phil scratches out the last sentence. He pauses, thoughtfully. He hears another noise, pauses, hears nothing.

He looks at his bedroom door, more specifically at the lock on it. He gets out of bed, walks to the door, listens and quickly locks it. While walking back to bed he thinks better of this and unlocks the door.

PHIL
Don't be ridiculous, Phil.

Pause. He locks it. Unlocks it. The lock breaks in his hand.

PHIL
Shit.

He stands there for a moment. Then he looks at a huge highboy chest of drawers and pushes it in front of the door. This takes a great deal of effort. Finally, it's blocking the door. He stands there, out of breath. A knock at the door.

NINA
Phillip?

PHIL
Shit.
(aloud)
Just a minute.

He pushes the huge highboy back to its original place.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL
I'm coming. Just a second!

Exhausted and sweating, he opens the door. Nina stands there.

NINA
What's the matter?

PHIL
I was exercising.

PHIL
It sounded like you were moving furniture.

PHIL
That's how I exercise. Some people aerobicize. Some jog. I move furniture. Very envigorating. When I really feel up, I bench press the dining room set.

NINA
(laughs at him)
You're so odd.

PHIL
Thank you.

NINA
I want to thank you for everything you've done for me.

PHIL
I haven't done anything for you.

She kisses him, all innocent loveliness. As he lustfully watches her walk to her room, he wonders how he could ever have doubted her. He closes the door to his room.

He climbs in bed and lies there for a moment before he bounds up and props a chair under the door handle. He leaps back into bed and turns out the lights.

PHIL
God, I hate myself sometimes.

EXT. PHIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

In a car parked on the road, two MEN watch the light go out in Phil's room.

EXT. PHIL'S HOUSE - THE NEXT MORNING

A beautiful morning.

INT. KITCHEN

Phil walks into the kitchen, surprised. Nina's cleaned the place. It's amazingly different. The table's set and food's waiting for him. He looks at the porch off the kitchen. Spotless. Phil walks into the yard.

EXT. YARD - MORNING

Nina's feeding birds by hand, speaking to them in Romanian. The animals, sensing Phil, rush away.

NINA
Good morning.

PHIL
When do you vacuum the lawn?

NINA
I want to help while I'm here.

INT. KITCHEN - A LITTLE LATER

Phil's eaten. Nina cleans up.

PHIL
I have to go into town and pick up some things.

NINA
I'll come with you.

EXT. GARAGE - SHORT TIME LATER

Nina sits in the passenger seat of the car. Phil is out working on the automatic garage door that's stuck.

PHIL
Sonofabitch!
(to Nina)
Push the button again.

The garage door begins to close. Phil is satisfied.

PHIL
About time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NINA
PHIL!

Phil turns and sees the car suddenly lunge toward him. He's trapped between the garage door and the oncoming car.

Just before the car crushes him, Phil bounds onto the hood of it and lands with his face pressed into the windshield. The car stops, halfway through the splintered garage door. Phil breathes heavily, his face resting on the windshield.

NINA
Oh, Phillip. I'm sorry.

PHIL
It's okay. No problem. Just shut the engine off.

Nina nervously switches a button but it's for the windshield wiper that slaps Phil in the face several times before Nina turns the key and shuts the engine down.

INT. KITCHEN - SHORT TIME LATER

Nina is putting a bandage on Phil's cut forehead.

NINA
I don't know what happened. I must have touched the gas pedal.

PHIL
Accidents happen. Pearl Harbor. Little Big Horn.

NINA
Please for give me.

PHIL
It's okay. Let's go. Ah!

He limps in some pain.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - DAY

Phil's car pulls out and disappears down the road. Beat. A SECOND CAR with the two MEN follows them at a distance. A THIRD CAR stops in front of Phil's house. It's Frank. He gets out of his car and walks up the driveway toward the house.

EXT. STREET IN VILLAGE - DAY

A pretty Connecticut village green.

INT. GENERAL STORE

Nina buys a hunting knife, a gruesome affair.

CLERK
Be careful not to store it near dampness. It'd corrode the blade.

INT. STORE - OTHER AISLE

Phil approaches Nina but stops when he sees what's she's buying. He stands behind a magazine rack, picks up a magazine and pretends to leaf through it, while he watches Nina.

INT. NINA AND CLERK

Nina slips the knife into her purse and walks out of the store.

EXT. STORE - DAY

Phil looks for her. He stops at the alley between the stores. He sees Nina, walking on her hands to the delight of Children surrounding her. Blood is trickling from his forehead cut.

PHIL
Nina?

NINA
I'm showing them how to walk on their hands.
(to Children)
Start by using a wall to lean against.

An attractive lady, JENNIFER, approaches Phil.

JENNIFER
Hello, Phil. Been a long time.

They share a somewhat awkward kiss.

PHIL
Jennifer. Hi. How are you?

JENNIFER
(points to his forehead)
You're bleeding.

PHIL
It's nothing. I always bleed there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JENNIFER
I hear you have a new love interest.

PHIL
Who told you that?

Jennifer spots Nina walking upside down. Phil calls to her.

PHIL
Nina. This is Jennifer, an old ... friend of mine.

NINA
Hello.

Nina continues to walk upside down for the Children.

JENNIFER
She's lovely, Phil.

PHIL
Very coordinated. Not everybody can do that.

JENNIFER
I'll bet. She must save a fortune on shoes.

Jennifer smiles cattily and leaves. Nina jumps upright and comes to him.

PHIL
Did you get what you wanted?

NINA
Yes.

They head down the street.

INT. PHIL'S HOUSE - DAY

Frank's in Nina's room, looking through her things. He finds a pair of white gloves and a photograph of Nina and others who might be her family. He looks out the window and then leaves the room.

EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY

Phil and Nina load groceries into their car.

EXT. OTHER CAR - DAY

Watching Phil and Nina are two MEN in a parked car. Clearly, they work for those involved with the U.N. Mission. When Phil's car pulls out, this one follows at a distance.

INT. PHIL'S CAR - DAY

Nina notices the car following them. She turns and looks. Then she turns back so as not to alert Phil.

INT. PHIL'S STUDY

Phil's at his desk writing rapidly.

PHIL (V.O.)
She was the most remarkable person he'd ever met. She could walk on her hands for children as calmly as another woman could saunter on high heels. What could she have been before he met her?

Phil looks out the window to the lawn.

EXT. LAWN - POV PHIL

Nina has Phil's bow and arrow and shoots at a target. She's very accomplished at this, very good.

PHIL (V.O.)
He couldn't tell if she found him attractive. She was hard to read. Maybe it was stupid to even think like that since he didn't know who she was. Or if he trusted her. Was what happened that morning an accident? What did she intend to do with the knife? What if Frank was right?
(beat)
What if she didn't find him attractive?

Nina shoots an arrow. It's a bullseye.

EXT. PHIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Phil puts the garbage in a couple of trash barrels sitting at the driveway's end. Returning to the house he passes a small ground-level window to the basement. A light is coming from the window. He walks over to investigate.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Nina's in the pantry area. She takes the hunting knife out of a paper bag and hides it on a shelf behind some tins of flour. She knocks a flour tin off the shelf and it spills all over.

EXT. PHIL

Phil reacts to what he sees.

INT. BASEMENT PANTRY

The flour's all over the place, including some on her face. She puts the tin back on the shelf but in a small mirror hanging near the shelves sees the flour on her face.

She stares at her reflection. Then she takes the flour tin and, using her hand, begins to paint her face with it. In a few moments her face is nearly all white from it.

She reaches into a bag of charcoal briquettes and uses a piece of charcoal to make exaggerated lines around her mouth and crosses over her eyes.

EXT. YARD - NIGHT

Phil watches, transfixed. He moves closer, making a noise.

INT. BASEMENT PANTRY

Nina hears Phil's noise and looks. Phil's moved away from the window. She sees nothing. She turns back to her reflection.

INT. PHIL'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Phil writes in his notebook.

PHIL (V.O.)
Then she hid the knife and wiped the flour off her face with an old rag.

INT. COURT ROOM GALLERY - DAY

Phil sits with the Owls. He's less together than before. He's not wearing a tie with his suit and he's fidgety.

MILLIE
Where's your tie?

(CONTINUED)

PHIL
(looks)
I must've forgotten it. You think you could do some research for me?

OLIVER
Name it.

PHIL
It's for my new book.

F.X.
How's it going?

PHIL
Good. It's a winner. Finally, huh?
(to Oliver)
I want you to see what you can find out about Nina.

ROSE
She won't tell you?

PHIL
I'm using her in my story. A character loosely based on her, that is. And I don't know if she'd like that.

OLIVER
What do you need?

PHIL
Your friend at immigration who helped me with my other book?

OLIVER
Henry?

PHIL
I need him to check out some things about Nina.

OLIVER
I'll see what he can dig up.

PHIL
Here's her name and passport number. That's all I have. I need filler. Details.
(more)

PHIL (Cont'd)
Birthdate, birthplace, past jobs, anything he can get.
(beat)
For the character.

ROSE
Are you sorry you got involved with her?

PHIL
No. No, I'm not. I think I'm falling in love her.
(beat)
If you'd told me two weeks ago that I'd fall in love with a total stranger who I met when she was being arraigned for murder and who won't tell me anything about herself, I'd have said that was pretty unlikely. But here I am. Love makes its own rules, doesn't it?

ROSE
Yes, it does.
(beat)
Be careful.

INT. SAM'S OFFICE - DAY

Phil sits opposite Sam who waves pages enthusiastically.

PHIL
Is it as good as I think it is?

SAM
It's better. This is gonna put you back on top.

PHIL
I know. I know.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

From a distance we make out two people in a row boat.

PHIL (V.O.)
The days were odd. Nina was incredibly sweet.
(more)

CONTINUED:

PHIL (Cont'd)
He could talk to her about anything and she always seemed fascinated. In no time at all, she'd become a part of his life. And yet she rarely ever spoke about herself.

EXT. BOAT ON LAKE - DAY

Phil and Nina in a row boat. Phil rows lazily. Nina sits in the rear facing him. A lovely, sweet mood. Idyllic.

PHIL
I dropped out of law school to write. Finally I got this job writing copy for an ad agency. Ridiculous stuff. Jingles for toothpastes, dog foods. You probably didn't get many of them in Romania. Then one day they gave me an account to prepare. This new cranberry apple drink. I worked it all out but the artist got things confused and I gave an entire presentation on a product called Crapple. I was fired.

Nina laughs at this, causing Phil to laugh at his own memory.

NINA
I'm sorry. It is not funny.

PHIL
It is funny. It was the best thing that ever happened to me. To both of us, Susan and me. I sat down and wrote my first book. I wrote three best sellers in a row. Life was great. I was on a roll. Then Susan died. I hit a wall. I couldn't write. I couldn't do anything.

NINA
You loved her very much.

PHIL
Yes, I did.

NINA
You are writing now, yes?

PHIL
I got a new idea. A good one. It's going to get me back in a big way.

NINA
What's it about?

PHIL
(pauses; lies)
An old idea I had. For a long time. I'm reworking it.
(changes subject)
What about you? What did you do in Romania?

NINA
I worked with my family. We're gypsies.

PHIL
Gypsies? Really? Like with scarves on your heads and rings in your ears?

NINA
No. Not like that.

PHIL
I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make fun of you. What does your family do back there?

NINA
My father's family is very good at their work. They are famous.

PHIL
Why did you come here then?

NINA
My father says to be free. Gypsies cannot be imprisoned. Legend says that if they are, they will die.

Nina's said a lot, but THUNDER overhead saves her. Phil starts to row toward the shore.

PHIL
It's going to rain.

NINA
So?

PHIL
(smiles; shrugs)
Yeah. So?

It begins to rain. Phil smiles at Nina as she leans back her face and the rain wets her face. The rain wets Phil's face, too, as he lets the oars float on either side of the boat.

INT. PHIL'S OFFICE - LATE NIGHT

Phil types excitedly at his desk. In the doorway to the room, unseen by Phil, stands Nina, watching him.

PHIL V.O.)
Why was she so secretive about herself and her gypsy family? And what did she do with her days? Or on her long walks? Did she meet secretly with someone? Always, when he examined his fears, they were unfounded. Without real proof.

He turns to the door but Nina's no longer there.

INT. COURT HOUSE COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Phil, Rose, Oliver and Millie. Phil nervously takes a cigarette from MIllie and puffs on it. The first one we've seen him smoke.

OLIVER
She's over here on a student visa. All very legal.

MILLIE
Tell him about her family.

PHIL
What about them?

ROSE
Her family was also here three years ago on a diplomatic visa.

PHIL
Where are they now?

OLIVER
They went back to Romania.

PHIL
Are you sure?

ROSE
Six months after they came. It's in the records.

PHIL
She told me they were still here.

MILLIE
She's not telling you the truth.

PHIL
I think she is. I think they are still here.

ROSE
If they are, then they're here illegally.

PHIL
Thanks, guys.

Phil leaves. Rose turns to the others.

ROSE
I'm worried about that boy.

INT. PHIL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Phil watches Nina who steps out of the pool and puts a towel around herself.

PHIL (V.O.)
He was torn in two directions. Driven by two different demons. He felt increasingly nervous around her. Yet he didn't want her to leave.

Nina enters with fresh flowers.

NINA
I picked these for you.

She puts them in a vase.

PHIL
They're beautiful. I'm going into town early tomorrow. I've got to see Sam and get a haircut.

NINA
Let me give you one.

PHIL
A haircut?

NINA
I used to cut my brothers and sisters hair all the time.

PHIL
No, really.

NINA
Don't you trust me?

A beat as they look at one another.

INT. KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

Phil sits in a chair as Nina drapes a towel around his shoulder and takes a large pair of scissors.

NINA
Are these sharp enough?

PHIL
They look very sharp to me. Besides my hair is very dull. It's a family trait. Dull hair.

NINA
You're a funny man.

She approaches with the scissors. Phil tenses.

PHIL
Just a trim. Nothing radical.

Nina cuts a tiny snip of hair. Phil jumps up immediately.

PHIL
Great! Perfect! Just what I wanted! God, you're wonderful at this! You should think about opening your own salon.

NINA
I didn't cut anything.

PHIL
It's not how much you cut. It's where you cut it. Minimalism.
(looks in hand mirror)
It's a totally new me. How can I ever thank you?

Nina pushes him back in the chair.

NINA
Sit down, silly!
(he sits)
You're a very nervous man.

PHIL
I'm relaxed. Honestly. I just look nervous when I'm relaxed.

NINA
Trust me.

She starts to cut his hair, working very quickly, the scissors flashing in front of his face, near his eyes. Nina smoothes his hair with her hand. Phil reacts to her touch.

NINA
Cutting someone's hair is very sensuous. Don't you think?

Nina's bathrobe is tied loosely. Evidently she's has taken off her swimming suit under it. Phil can make out the contours of her body and breasts as she pulls it tighter around herself but it keeps opening again.

PHIL
That depends. When I was a kid I used to go to this barber, Fred Lally. He'd give me a crewcut with electric clippers in about 30 seconds. He had a glass eye and a cauliflower ear. It wasn't sensual at all.

She continues to stroke his hair as she cuts it.

NINA
You make fun alot.

PHIL
What do you mean?

NINA
You hide your feelings, don't you? In jokes. In - how do you say it? - sarcas - ?

Nina is gauging the length of the sides by holding his face in her hands and her face very close to his. He's dying.

PHIL
Sarcasm. You're right. I do.

NINA
You should tell me how you feel. The truth. It would make me happy.

She begins to cut his hair in earnest. If ever there was a sexual metaphor for a scene, this is it. Every action she takes, every sound she utters is filled with a sexual ambiguity not lost on Phil. Phil is mesmerized by her body which he can glimpse beneath her robe.

NINA
(cutting)
Move toward me more. More. More. That's good. Very good. Yes.

The suddenly she steps back.

NINA
There. Finished.

Nina takes a small mirror and holds it up for his to see. He looks into the mirror but he's still transfixed by the sensuality of the scene he's just experienced. He nods without really looking at his hair.

NINA
Good?

PHIL
Perfect. How was it for you?

Nina smiles at his question.

EXT. LAWN - LATE AFTERNOON

Nina practices archery at the target.

INT. PHIL'S OFFICE

Phil watches Nina through his office window. He's on the phone with Frank.

PHIL
I resent your insinuations, Frank. She's a sweet girl. A wonderful person.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT

Frank speaks with Phil.

FRANK (O.S.)
You sound tense.

EXT. THE LAWN - MINUTES LATER - POV PHIL

Nina prepares another shot on the lawn. A large GERMAN SHEPHERD DOG approaches her.

PHIL (O.S.)
I've never been happier.

FRANK (O.S.)
You screw her yet?

INT. PHIL'S STUDY

PHIL
You're so damn crude, you know that?

FRANK
Okay, let me rephrase that. Have you slept with her?

PHIL
No. Not yet.

FRANK
When are you coming into the city?

PHIL
Why?

FRANK
I want to talk to you about some things I found out about Nina.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL
What did you find?

FRANK
It could be nothing really.

EXT. LAWN

Nina aims the arrow at the target and fires an arrow. Then she takes another and aims it.

INT. PHIL'S STUDY

PHIL
Jesus Christ, Frank! Of course it's nothing. There's nothing to find. Would you get off her case? The girl is wonderful. She's a saint.

FRANK
Call it cop sense, but I still don't trust her.

PHIL
You're a very sick man, you know that? And it's starting to piss me off.

FRANK
It's my job.

PHIL
You know what your problem is?

FRANK
No. What is my problem?

PHIL
You're jealous because you've never had a decent relationship. It's the greatest thing in the world. It makes you want to skip down the street, to yell out in joy all the time. Do you feel that in your life?

FRANK
No. Tell me about it.

Here, an arrow smashes throw a pane of glass and lands firmly in Phil's thigh. He screams in agony and falls to the floor.

CONTINUED:

PHIL
AAHHHH!

FRANK
Okay, okay. I didn't ask for a fucking recital.

Phil cringes in agony as he tries to finish this conversation with Frank as normally as possible.

FRANK
Look, I'm sorry. Maybe I am a little paranoid. It comes with the job. But you're my buddy.

PHIL
Right.

Phil stumbles about the room in increasing agony, trying to sound pleasant to Frank.

FRANK
So maybe I am a little jealous of you. She's beautiful.

PHIL
Exactly.

FRANK
What's she like?

PHIL
It's hard to explain. AAAHHHH!

FRANK
That good, huh?

PHIL
Good.

FRANK
Listen, pal, am I'm interrupting something there?

PHIL
Yes. Yes, you are.

FRANK
(leering laugh)
What? Come on, you can tell me, man. What's happening?

PHIL
Thanks, Frank. AAAHHHH!

FRANK
This is the next best thing to being there. I got an idea. Put the phone on the table and let me listen. I won't make a sound. I promise.

PHIL
Goodbye, Frank.

FRANK
You're a selfish man. You know that?

Phil hangs up, looks at the arrow imbedded in his thigh and screams just as Nina comes into the study.

PHIL
AAAHHHH!

NINA
Oh, my God.

INT. CAR - SHORT TIME LATER

Nina drives Phil's car wildly, honking, careening down the small roads. Phil sits in the passenger seat, the arrow sticking out of his thigh, bleeding.

PHIL
I thought you said you drove in Romania.

NINA
This is how we drive in Romania.

PHIL
AAhhh! Jesus Christ!

NINA
I didn't see the dog. It jumped at me from behind.

PHIL
It was an accident. Don't blame yourself.

NINA
What are you going to tell the doctor?

PHIL
That I shot myself.

NINA
With a bow and arrow?

PHIL
I didn't know it was loaded.

NINA
How can you make jokes in such pain?

PHIL
I don't know how. It's just a lucky gift I have.

NINA
You're a courageous man.

Nina smiles endearingly at him and drives over a curb, causing the car to jostle.

PHIL
AAAHHHH!

INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ENTRANCE - MINUTES LATER

Nina helps a limping Phil to a desk. The DOCTOR, a smiling East Indian who looks no older than 18, speaks to Phil.

DOCTOR
What seems to be the problem?

PHIL
Why don't you examine me and see if you can figure it out?

DOCTOR
(finally sees arrow)
Oh!

INT. RESTAURANT - EVENING

Fencik meets with Grundig and Petrov over dinner.

GRUNDIG
His friends have been asking questions about her.

FENCIK
That is not good.

CONTINUED:

PETROV
She's made no contact with the others. I'm sure of that.

FENCIK
I'm worried about her escaping our watch.

INT. PHIL'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Phil sits in a chair, his leg bandaged and propped, writing.

PHIL (V.O.)
He was going crazy. Was it an accident? Should he believe the story about the dog? Why couldn't he think? Was he so bedazzled by this woman? She was just a woman, for Christ's sake. He couldn't continue this way. Something had to give. He had to confront her.

He hears a splash and looks out to the backyard pool.

EXT. POOL - NIGHT - POV PHIL

Nina, naked, swims in the lighted pool. She's a vision.

INT. PHIL'S BEDROOM

Phil stares in awe.

PHIL (V.O.)
He decided to wait a while longer.

INT. PHIL'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Phil sleeps. The door to his room opens slowly. Phil, hearing this, stirs. He looks to see Nina walking toward him. She stands at the foot of his bed and slips the robe from her shoulders, revealing herself to him. She crawls into the bed with him.

NINA
I love you.

He kisses her passionately. They break the kiss and he looks up at her. Suddenly, her face is WHITE like when he saw her in the basement. Her eyes have black death crosses over them. She smiles wickedly and blood drips from her lips.

INT. PHIL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Phil wakes from his dream, breathing heavily.

INT. NEW YORK COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Phil and Frank finish coffee. Phil is more dishevelled. His shirt, suit and tie are badly mismatched. His hair's not as neatly combed. He picks up the check.

FRANK
I've never seen anybody wear a plaid flannel shirt and a grey suit before.

Phil wipes his mouth with his tie.

PHIL
I appreciate your fashion concern, Frank, but tell me what you found out.

Phil moves and winces in pain from his wounded leg.

FRANK
How's the leg?

PHIL
Fine.
(Frank nods)
I told you. It was an accident.

FRANK
There are no such things as accidents. Only plans other people make and never tell you about.

PHIL
Spare me your street philosophy. You said you found something out.

FRANK
I told you it was nothing. Just a hunch. It didn't lead anywhere.

PHIL
Don't bullshit me. You're hiding something!

FRANK
Jesus, calm down. Why don't you just kick her out if she's making you nuts?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL
(lifts coffee cup)
I love her. Don't you know a man in love when you see him?

FRANK
I thought you didn't drink coffee.

PHIL
(drinks coffee)
I don't. It makes me nervous.

Phil gulps the rest of his coffee and leaves a tip.

FRANK
You really wanna leave a 50 dollar tip?

PHIL
(grabs it back quickly)
People in love do funny things.
(leaves a couple of dollars instead)
You don't know dick about love, do you?

EXT. PHIL'S HOUSE - DAY

Nina goes down the steps to the basement.

INT. CLOSEUP OF PHIL

Phil speaks with great emotion, very heatedly.

PHIL
So I say, look at what drives our characters, what drives us. Lust. LUST!!! We're all such wimps in its power. We let it run our lives like a dope pusher. But don't kid yourselves. We're all its willing victims, like it or not! We get what we deserve. We get what we want!
(he wipes his forehead)
Any questions?

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM

We PULL BACK to see that Phil is addressing a group of ELDERLY WOMEN. On the wall behind him is a banner that reads: JUNIOR LEAGUE MYSTERY GUILD. An awkward pause as the Ladies collect themselves after Phil's emotional harangue. A WOMAN stands.

WOMAN
People say that you've based the suave, worldly character of Sebastian Powers on yourself. Is that true?

The assembled Ladies titter politely.

PHIL
Yes, that's absolutely true.

But during his answer, far from acting suave, he knocks over a pitcher of water onto his podium soaking everything. The glass pitcher falls from the podium. Phil makes attempts to catch it going through a series of movements that look like they were choreographed for The Harlem Globetrotters. Finally, the pitcher crashes to the floor, shattering into a million pieces.

PHIL
Next question, please.

INT. PHIL'S BASEMENT - DAY

In the semi-darkness, a flashlight shines on a gas heater. Two hands with gloves on them, pull a rubber tubing hose from its housing and arrange it differently.

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - DAY

Phil and Sam stand in line at an automatic bank teller.

SAM
I can't believe this story is really you and Nina.

PHIL
Believe it.

SAM
You don't really think she's trying to kill you, do you?

PHIL
No. Yes. Maybe. No. I don't know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAM
What's she like in bed?

PHIL
I haven't slept with her.

SAM
You haven't slept with her???
Then what's the point of all this?

PHIL
I love her!

SAM
I'm sorry. I keep forgetting.

PHIL
God! Doesn't anybody understand a man in love anymore? The nauseous feelings that rise from the pit of your stomach? The cold sweats that erupt without warning? The tensions, the pain, the uncertainty. Where the hell has romance gone today?

SAM
Good point.

PHIL
The most important thing is I need her to finish this book. I'm not creating this story, remember. She is. We are. Together. I don't know what comes next.

SAM
Make it up.

PHIL
I can't. It won't ring true. I need her for this story. I'm obsessed with her.

SAM
Well, if it's any consolation, this is the best stuff of yours I've ever read.

PHIL
I know it is. I can feel it. Ever since she moved in, it flows. Effortlessly.
(more)

PHIL (Cont'd)
I just write what she does, what she says, what I feel.

SAM
So what's the problem?

PHIL
I have to get into it now. I need details. Facts about her. Who she is. Where she came from. Why.

SAM
Ask her.

PHIL
I told you I can't. That was part of our deal.

SAM
Do some investigating on your own.

PHIL
Haven't you ever kept a promise to anyone?

SAM
No.

PHIL
What am I gonna do? I love her and I'm terrified of her.

SAM
It's like being married.

The WOMAN at the automatic teller keeps pushing buttons. Phil screams at her.

PHIL
What are you getting, for Christ sake? A FUCKING MORTGAGE?!?

The Woman turns and looks at him.

SAM
Calm down, will you?

EXT. PHIL'S HOUSE - DAY

Nina gets on her bike and heads down the road.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Phil gets on the end of a line waiting to board a bus. Phil drops some coins.

SAM
You're a wreck.

PHIL
I can't keep writing this story, Sam. I can't. But I have to.

EXT. / INT. PHONE BOOTH - AFTERNOON

Nina speaks into a payphone in the village.

NINA
Tell mother and father I'm safe and not to worry. I'll come to them when the time is right. It could be very soon now. I love you all very much.

She hangs up and gets back on her bike. From a distance two MEN in a CAR watch her.

INT. VILLAGE STORE - DAY

In a village shop Nina looks at a cosmetics display. She's obviously interested but shy. She spots Jennifer, Phil's ex-girlfriend, buying something from the SALES LADY behind the cosmetics counter. They make eye contact. Nina smiles.

NINA
Hello.

JENNIFER
(smiles cooly)
Phillip's new friend. Hello. I didn't recognize you right side up.

Nina watches Jennifer leave, envious of her worldiness. Nina musters enough courage to approach the SALESLADY.

LADY
May I help you?

NINA
Yes, please.
(points to cosmetics)
I need these to make me attractive to a man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LADY
(impressed by Nina's natural beauty)
You?

NINA
I want to look like her.

Nina points to a photo of a heavily made up model.

INT. BUS

Phil and Sam sit together near the front of the bus. On Phil's side is a small BOY, about 7.

SAM
Don't cut your own throat. You need this story.

PHIL
You think I don't know that?

The BOY next to Phil points to the back of the bus and speaks to his MOTHER.

BOY
Mommy. That lady has a gun.

Phil turns immediately to the boy.

PHIL
What did you say?

MOTHER
(poking her son)
Don't talk to strange men, Freddy! A man like that could take advantage of you and do nasty, horrible things to you.

The Mother smiles politely to Phil and the Boy stares at Phil repulsed. Phil isn't concerned with them, however. He spots a WOMAN, in the rear with long hair like Nina's covered in a scarf and wearing sunglasses. Phil tries to get a better look.

SAM
You didn't make any kind of contract, did you? I mean you got nothing written down, right?

INT. BUS - LADY IN BACK - POV PHIL

What Phil sees is this mysterious WOMAN, about Nina's height and size. In her hand he notices a shiny metallic object flash as she pockets it.

INT. BUS - PHIL AND SAM

Sam rattles on as Phil sweats, not taking his eyes off the WOMAN in the rear of the bus.

SAM
I mean, why does she have to know you're writing about her?

Phil doesn't listen. He sees only the WOMAN in the back with the gun in her hand.

SAM
It's probably all in your mind anyway. By the time you finish it and we make the movie deal, all this'll be ancient history. Fuck it. I say write it.

PHIL
That woman.

SAM
What woman?

PHIL
In the back. The one in the glasses and scarf. Don't move.

SAM
What about her? Phil? Are you okay? You're shaking.

The tension builds. The WOMAN makes a sudden movement upward with her hand holding the gun. Phil jumps to his feet, pointing. He screams dramatically.

PHIL
GET DOWN! SHE'S GOT A GUN!

Phil falls spreadeagle to the bus floor. But at the back of the bus the WOMAN in question takes a silver barrette and puts it in her hair as she turns to look at the commotion Phil's causing up front.

The PASSENGERS, New Yorkers who've seen it all, merely stare disgustedly at Phil on the bus's floor. Sam looks at his friend in amazement. An OLD LADY points to Phil's now empty seat and speaks to Sam.

(CONTINUED)

OLD LADY
Is this seat taken?

SAM
No.

The Old Lady sits in it. Phil stands up, embarrassed, and brushes himself off.

INT. NINA'S ROOM -AFTERNOON

Nina's bought some new clothes and tries them on. There's something different in her manner here. Something more determined. Are these the naturally seductive tactics of a woman possibly in love or is there more to it?

She hears a car and looks out the window. It's Phil coming back from the city. She is excited to see him.

EXT. PHIL'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Phil and Nina eat supper. Nina's dressed more seductively. She's made up, too, although Phil, deeply distracted, doesn't take notice. He drinks a lot of wine. Nina's aware of his distraction. It disappoints her.

NINA
Did you have a nice day?

PHIL
(sarcastically)
No broken bones, no magor traumas. My insurance company called to thank me.

NINA
Are you unhappy?

PHIL
Me? Unhappy? Are you kidding? The creator of the always cool, suave, implacable Sebastian Powers unhappy? They wouldn't let me be unhappy.

NINA
Who wouldn't?

PHIL
My admiring public. My fans. They have their expectations.

CONTINUED:

NINA
I don't expect anything.

Phil looks at Nina.

PHIL
Who are you?

NINA
What do you mean?

PHIL
I mean why can't you tell me about yourself?

NINA
I wish I could.

PHIL
Then tell me.

NINA
I can't.

PHIL
Why not?

NINA
It's for your own good.

PHIL
(stands)
Oh, well, that certainly makes me feel a hundred percent better.

NINA
Please, don't be angry.

PHIL
I'm going to do some work.

Nina watches him grab a bottle of whiskey from a sideboard and leave. Her disappointment is etched on her face.

INT. PHIL'S BEDROOM - MINUTES LATER

Nina leaves a note on his pillow. And a single rose next to it. She leaves the room.

INT. PHIL'S STUDY - A SHORT TIME LATER

Phil writes between slugs of whiskey . He's pretty drunk.

PHIL (V.O.)
I was -
(crosses out the word)
He - HE! He was coming apart. He was forgetting appointments, losing things. Something had to give. The game had to move on. She must become either mistress or murderess. He, either victim or lover. It was time.

He storms out of the room.

INT. NINA'S BATHROOM

Nina prepares for romance. She takes a large pair of scissors and cuts a page from one of Phil's Playboy Magazines. It's an ad which she tucks into the mirror's frame. She starts to make up like the model in the ad.

INT. BASEMENT PANTRY

Phil searches the shelves where he saw Nina hide the knife. He can't find it. This scares him.

PHIL (V.O.)
The knife was gone. Had his questions pushed her to the edge? He had to confront her before she could use it.

INT. HALLWAY

Phil, swaggering from the whiskey, walks up the stairs. He stops outside Nina's bathroom, listening.

INT. BATHROOM

She puts on perfume liberally and brushes her teeth. She remembers something. Toothpaste drips from her lip as she exits hurriedly.

INT. HALLWAY

Phil hears Nina's bathroom door start to open and he hides behind a half open linen closet door. He watches her. What he sees is Nina, scissors in hand, and toothpaste on her chin, rush into her bedroom.

PHIL (V.O.)
She carried the knife. There was a madness in her eye, in her manner.

Her bedroom door closes and Phil walks to it. He puts his ear against it to listen.

INT. NINA'S BEDROOM

Nina hears Phil outside and, thinking he's come for love, smiles. She hurries to prepare herself for him.

INT. HALLWAY

Phil stares at the bedroom door in his semi-drunken state.

PHIL (V.O.)
He was going to find out the truth about her!

Phil rushes to crash in the door.

INT. NINA'S BEDROOM

The door's open and Phil crashes through it and into a huge armoire against the wall. He collapses.

INT. NINA'S BEDROOM - SHORT TIME LATER

Phil lies on Nina's bed. She holds a wet washcloth to his forehead.

PHIL
I thought I heard someone in the house.

NINA
I was waiting for you.

PHIL
You were? Why?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NINA
I love you, Phillip. Make love to me.

Nina's look melts him. She kisses him passionately and he returns the kiss with equal passion.

PHIL
God, I love you.

NINA
(as if memorized)
Jam your hot love rod into my wet, throbbing passion nest.

Phil, taken aback at what he thinks he's heard, looks at her.

PHIL
I'm sorry.

NINA
Grab my lust melons and suck my love nectar with your hot animal tongue.

PHIL
(even more amazed)
What?

NINA
Shove your sex axle into my drive train -

PHIL
Wait a minute! What are you saying?

NINA
Words of love.

PHIL
Whose words of love?

NINA
From your book.

She points to Phil's copy of Penthouse FORUM on her bedside table. Phil starts to laugh. Nina's embarrassed.

PHIL
You read that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NINA
I memorized them. Isn't this what Americans say in love?

PHIL
(laughs)
I don't believe it.

NINA
What is funny?
(pulls away)
Nevermind.

Phil tries to catch hold of her. She pulls away, embarrassed.

PHIL
Stop. You're adorable. You really are. You put makeup on, didn't you?
(she turns away)
How could I ever have doubted you?

NINA
You were laughing at me.

PHIL
I wasn't.
(beat)
I take that back. Yes, I was. But not at you. Just at what you were saying. I mean, when you read those things, maybe. But when someone actually says them to you, no way. You don't have to memorize pornography. Let it come out of you naturally. In any language.
(he holds her tightly)
Come here. I love you.

NINA
I love you, too.

PHIL
I haven't felt like this in so long.

Nina whispers something in Romanian. Then she slips off her clothes and they fall onto the bed, kissing him passionately. She keeps repeating the same word as they make love.

PHIL
What does that word mean in English?

NINA
Ramrod.

Phil laughs. Their love making is very passionate, energetic, an outlet for everything they've been holding back.

INT. SAME - LATER

They've made love. They're both very happy. Nina gets up. She looks at the bedside clock and puts a robe on.

NINA
I'm going to swim.

PHIL
Now?

She blows him a kiss and exits. He struts happily, foolishly.

INT. BASEMENT

CLOSEUP of the gas tank which had its tubing rerouted earlier that day. Something is happening here. Smoke is billowing around it.

INT. NINA'S BEDROOM

A post coital grin across his face, Phil watches Nina in the pool as he writes.

PHIL (V.O.)
The tension was broken. Fear had been replaced by love. Totally. But more than that, he was assured. This was no murderess. This was the best sex he ever had. He could never let her go now. He never felt happier. Or safer.

Nina blows Phil a kiss from poolside.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT - POV NINA

We see Phil staring out the window. He blows a kiss to Nina when suddenly a huge, fiery explosion rocks the house.

EXT. HOUSE - A SHORT TIME LATER

Phil, bandaged, and Nina, in a blanket, watch FIREMEN fight flames that engulf a large portion of his house. Neighbors watch, too. We close in on Phil's shell-shocked expression.

EXT. EAST RIVER PARK - DAY

In a Sutton Place park, the Romanians meet. Fencik is angry.

GRUNDIG
He was in the house. She was not.

FENCIK
His injuries?

GRUNDIG
Minor.

FENCIK
Does he suspect anything?

GRUNDIG
The police say a gas line ruptured.

FENCIK
I have a feeling she will try to see the others soon. She's been away from them too long a time and these gypsies are drawn to each other. She will leave to go to them or they will come to her. We must watch her closely.

INT. SAM'S OFFICE - DAY

Phil sits with a very excited Sam.

SAM
Give it up?! Are you out of your mind? I've never seen the guys upstairs so excited about anything!

PHIL
You showed them the chapters?

SAM
I had to. They wanted to know what I was so turned on about. And they agree with me. They're doing handstands over this stuff. They're talking about a Christmas release, huge first printing and Book of the Month Club. They've already lined up the Today Show, Letterman, all the big ones. This book is going to put you right at the top, Phil. The very top. Just keep writing! Don't stop!

Sam smiles greedily. Phil forces a smile.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - DAY

Phil and Nina have moved in with his brother, GARY, a Westchester architect. The home's large with an old barn behind it. A few horses are stabled there.

Gary, his wife SALLY, and their kids TONY and HEATHER, 9 and 11, are having a barbeque. Half a dozen NEIGHBORS join them.

Phil stands by the grill. Nina and Sally work on the salad with the women.

PHIL (V.O.)
He was torn now. The voice of reason screamed one thing. His glands said another. If there was one thing he was learning from all this it was that his reason was no match for his glands.

EXT. NINA AND SALLY

SALLY
I don't want to hear another word about it. Gary and I are delighted you're staying with us.

NINA
You're very kind.

SALLY
Yes, we are. But that's not the point.

ELAINE
When's the wedding?

NINA
We'd like to get married next month but the house won't be rebuilt until September.

SALLY
Then you'll get married right here.

NINA
Oh, no.

SALLY
I insist.

The Kids call to their mothers. They're playing on a ladder propped up against the barn.

SALLY
Get off that damned thing, Tony!

EXT. PHIL AND GARY

Phil stares blankly ahead. He wears two different colored tennis shoes and his hair's not combed at all. He stares at the grill as the hamburgers burst into flame. Gary salvages them.

GARY
Phil! Wake up! What are you making here? Meteorites?

PHIL
(sees what he's done)
I'm sorry, Gary.

GARY
Loosen up, little brother.
(ribs Phil)
Getting married's not the end of the world.

SALLY
Look how Nina handles that horse.

EXT. CORRAL

Nina strokes the nose of a large horse as she puts the bridle bit in its mouth. Several KIDS watch intently.

GARY
I don't know how she does it. No one else can get near that nag.

Phil watches Nina.

ELAINE
What's wrong with it?

GARY
It's just old. I got it from a circus. It performed with bears and stuff.

SALLY
She's a marvellous girl.

Phil distractedly wanders toward the salad table with Sally. Elaine and Molly notice his mood.

SALLY
Are you alright, Phil?

PHIL
I'm fine.

(CONTINUED)

SALLY
Look, Phil. I know you're a very independent guy. You pride yourself on being cool, aloof and all that. But something's bothering you.

MOLLY
We're all worried about you.

PHIL
You are?

SALLY
We want you to open up to us. We're family. Friends. We love you. For once break through that cold facade of yours and let it all come out. Come on.

Phil stares at her, quite moved. He shakes his head and speaks emotionally, staring at the ground.

PHIL
I'm over 40 years old and I'm an emotional nomad. When Susan died, I couldn't break out of it. I asked myself. Is it me? Am I looking for something too perfect? Judging everyone against a dead woman? Then I see this girl. Nina. She does things to me, she makes me feel like no one else has done in a long time.

But Sally and the other Women don't listen. They taste their salads while Phil opens his heart.

MOLLY
The potato salad needs more salt.

SALLY
It's got enough salt.

ELAINE
What it needs is dill.

PHIL
(continuing)
In one way she's perfect. I love her. Still, I have doubts about her. But who doesn't have doubts about the person they love?

SALLY
I found the dill!

Phil realizes no one's listening to him. He shakes his head.

ELAINE
Perfect.

Heather runs over to them.

HEATHER
Dad! Tony's stuck on the roof!

GARY
Oh, for Christ's sake!

The Guests all rush to the barn. Tony's hanging precariously to the rotted gable at the crest of the roof. He could be seriously hurt is he falls.

TONY
It broke, mom!

SALLY
Oh, my God! Don't worry, sweetheart, daddy'll get you down! Get him down, Gary.

Gary and several of the Men run to the barn, drag an old oil drum toward the lower edge of the roof and try to use it to reach the roof. Gary grabs the gutter and hangs there for a moment before he and the gutter crash to the ground.

PHIL
I'll get the ladder.

Phil rushes to the ladder and tries to carry it. But it's large and very unwieldy. It swings back and forth causing the other men to duck and breaking several windows. They all try their own technique of saving the boy: all hopeless. Tom arrives with a blanket to use as a net.

SALLY
Do something!

GARY
I'm trying.

TONY
MOM!

HEATHER
He's gonna fall!

The various Men look like Laurel and Hardy. Nina rushes to see what the commotion is.

Nina runs to the corral and jumps on the horse. Exhorting it to move, she gallops to the corral fence and hurdles it easily. As the horse heads toward the barn, Nina stands on its back, soothing it with her words.

Phil and Gary struggle with the ladder. They both try to climb it at the same time, knocking each other off.

PHIL
I got it.

GARY
Get out of the way. He's my son.

Gary climbs but it's an extension ladder and they haven't locked it securely. As a result, it slides and crashes to the ground with Gary on it.

Meanwhile, Nina standing on the horse's back arrives at the barn. The Men stop their farcical efforts and can only watch Nina in stunned silence.

She jumps off the horse and grabs hold of a loft door. She swings on it and reaches for a drainpipe. She grabs the drainpipe and pulls herself to the crest of the roof where she stands.

EXT. THE BARN ROOF

Nina walks the top edge of the roof toward Tony. Tony's grip slips and several shingles falls to the ground below.

SALLY
Oh, God!

TONY
Am I gonna fall?

NINA
Of course not. Stay still.

Nina approaches him and bends down.

NINA
Climb on my back.

Very carefully, Tony does just that. Miraculously, Nina maintains her balance and walks the edge of the roof toward the side of the barn with the open loft door. Once over the open door, she manages to take Tony and swing him into the loft. Then she swings herself in, too.

EXT. GROUND

The Women burst into applause and whistles. The Men look to each other and then to their feet, embarrassed.

WOMEN
Way to go, Nina! ... Let's hear it for the lady! ... Nice job!

GARY
(to Phil)
What did you say she did back in Romania?

PHIL
Receptionist.

Phil's face is a huge question mark.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Phil writes in his notebook.

PHIL (V.O.)
He loved her and feared her more than ever. She was part nymph, part enigma, part mountain goat. There was no question in his mind now. He wanted to marry her but before he did that he had to find out the truth about her.

Phil locks the bedroom door and goes to the closet. He opens Nina's bag and finds only a few letters in Romanian and several photographs. He and puts a letter in his own notebook. He also keeps the photograph.

The door jostles. Phil quickly opens it. Nina stands there in a very sexy nightgown.

NINA
Do you like it?

PHIL
Where'd you get it?

NINA
Sally gave it to me. She says she never uses it.

Nina sidles up to Phil seductively. Phil slides his notebook under the bed. Nina kisses him seductively. Phil responds. They fall into very passionate lovemaking.

EXT. PHONE BOOTH - WESTCHESTER TOWN - DAY

Nina speaks to her sister, Petra.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. APARTMENT

Petra is in a small New York apartment.

NINA
They're still watching me. I can't risk them finding you.

PETRA
Father's not well.

NINA
What is it?

PETRA
His heart. I'm scared. He's so afraid of those men. They want more money.

NINA
Where are you?

PETRA
I am at Ivan's. Can I see you?

NINA
No. It's too dangerous.

PETRA
I have a letter from mother. Please. Let me see you.

NINA
Saturday night.

PETRA
Where?

NINA
Write this down carefully. We can't have them follow us.

INT. COURT GALLERY - DAY

Phil sits with his friends, the Owls. F.X. holds the letter Phil took from Nina.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

F.X.
I'll ask my friend to translate this.

OLIVER
Are you alright, Phil?

PHIL
I'm fine.

ROSE
How's the house?

PHIL
I was going to redecorate anyway.

MILLIE
When are you getting married?

PHIL
I don't know.
(to F.X.)
Call me when he's finished.

He leaves them. They stare at one another.

MILLIE
What do you think about this girl, Rose?

OLIVER
You're the one who can say whether someone's guilty or not just by looking at them.

F.X.
What do you think about her?

ROSE
I don't know yet. I can't see into her.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Phil and Nina in the kitchen. Nina prepares a casserole.

PHIL
What do you mean you won't be at dinner? We announce our wedding then. We have guests. Frank's coming from New York.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NINA
I told you. It's an old gypsy custom.

PHIL
What is?

NINA
The bride prepares the meal and then leaves.

PHIL
For how long?

NINA
Until after. You keep one empty chair for me during the meal.

SALLY
I think it's a charming custom.

PHIL
I never heard of it before.

NINA
Of course not. It's gypsy. We've done it for centuries.

SALLY
How's your main course coming?

NINA
I've been letting it cool. It should be done now.

SALLY
I can't wait to try it.

PHIL
Where are you going to go?

NINA
For a walk.

Nina takes a large casserole dish out of the oven.

NINA
Remember, you have to toast me while I'm gone.
(kisses Phil)
I love you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She leaves him alone in the kitchen. He pokes at the main course casserole with a spoon. He checks to see no one's looking and he scoops out some of it to taste. He smells it. Then he puts it to his lips hesitantly.

A CAT jumps up on the counter and sniffs at the casserole.

PHIL
Get away from there, Beeswax!

But Phil has a thought. He spoons a little of the casserole onto a saucer just on the other side of the kitchen door. The cat laps it up eagerly.

EXT. HOUSE - LATER

It's dark now. Nina climbs out a rear 2nd story window of the house and jumps onto the porch roof. She sneaks along the roof and jumps to the ground. She runs quickly to a thicket of trees and disappears.

INT. DINING ROOM - THAT EVENING

At the dinner are Phil, Gary, Sally, Sam, his wife, AUDREY, and two empty seats. One for Nina, the other for Frank, who's late. Sally dishes out some casserole. They're all drinking quite heavily; Phil more than the rest.

SAM
I'll have some more.

AUDREY
Leave some for the others.
(to others)
He's such a glutton.

SALLY
Save some for Frank.

SAM
Where is he?

PHIL
He said he'd be late.

SALLY
I must get this recipe from Nina.

GARY
I can't quite put my finger on
that tannic taste.

(CONTINUED)

GARY
(toasting Nina)
Here's to the absent chef!

ALL
Here, here! ... To the chef! ... To Nina!

AUDREY
Still nervous, Phil?

SALLY
He's a wreck!

PHIL
You never really know who you're marrying, do you?

SALLY
That's the fun part.

SAM
People change.
(hugs Audrey)
This isn't the woman I married ten years ago.

AUDREY
Damn right it isn't. That woman lives on Central Park West. You married me 7 years ago.

SAM
Whatever.

AUDREY
Sam had nightmares the first night we were married.

PHIL
What?

SAM
I'll never forget it. I dreamed I saw the Goodyear Blimp, piloted by Captain Pete Petersen of La Jolla, California, hovering outside our bedroom window flashing these words on its belly: Sam, this is the last lady you'll ever have sex with. It was terrifying.

AUDREY
That isn't what you told me!

PHIL
More wine?

EXT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

Nina waits nervously by a small supply cabin near the tracks of the commuter station. She hears a sound and spots someone coming toward her in the darkness. It's Petra. They rush the last few steps to each other and embrace.

INT. DINING ROOM

The Guests are well into the wine, laughing, talking loudly. Phil, too, has loosened up for the first time in a while. He stands on his chair, wine bottle in hand, relating his relationship with Nina. The others laugh hysterically.

PHIL
... there I was standing in my study on the phone with Frank when this arrow comes through the window and skewers my left leg!
(laughter)
I thought she did it on purpose!

SALLY
Nina?! On purpose?!

SAM
You're kidding!

More raucous laughter.

PHIL
But wait! Here's the best part! I thought this girl, this saint, tried to blow up my house and me with it! Can you believe that?

SALLY
(crying with laughter)
He thought Nina tried to blow up his house!

PHIL
What an idiot I am!

More raucous laughter. Phil's mood shifts to maudlin.

CONTINUED:

PHIL
I love her. I do. She's my whole reason for living. How could I suspect her of anything?
(raises glass)
Here's to my Nina! My angel!

The others toast sentimentally. A noise from the kitchen.

PHIL
That's her! That's my Nina!

Phil rushes into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN

Phil looks for Nina. He opens the screen door. No sign of her. He spots Beeswax, the cat, lying next to her plate.

PHIL
Was that Nina, Beeswax?

The cat just lies motionless. Phil frowns, crouches next to the animal and pats it.

PHIL
Beeswax? ... Beeswax?

He pokes it. The cat is dead. He looks at the saucer next to the dead cat. Suddenly, it dawns on Phil that the cat was eating some of the casserole they all just devoured.

INT. DINING ROOM

SALLY
(wiping a tear)
I think they're an adorable couple.

As the others emotionally concur, Phil bursts into the room.

PHIL
SHE POISONED US!!!

EXT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

Nina and Petra talk. Nina folds her mother's letter.

NINA
Father wants me to come now and idtentify the men I saw that day. He says I can't wait any longer.

PETRA
What will that do?

NINA
He thinks if we can expose them it will be to our advantage. We can use that to stop them blackmailing us.

PETRA
Will you do it? Will you come?

NINA
Yes. But I'll have to be very careful. They'll follow me. They know that when I meet with father and the others, I become deadly to them.

INT. KITCHEN

Madness as the Guests react to the idea they've been poisoned. This is compounded by the fact they're still drunk. Phil and Gary prepare an antidote. Audrey pokes at the desserts. CONSUELA, the Panamanian housekeeper, avoids them as she calmly tidies the kitchen.

PHIL
That's why she left. Don't you see? There's no Romanian custom. She wanted to poison us all.

AUDREY
How could you fall in love with a murderer?

SAM
It's not easy to meet girls nowadays.

AUDREY
That slut! Give me some of that cheese cake.

SALLY
I'm getting the camera.

(CONTINUED)

GARY
What for?

AUDREY
(eating ravenously)
Do you have any ice cream? I'm going out with a smile on my lips.

PHIL
I'm such an idiot!

GARY
Here. We mixed the antidote for the liquid drain opener.

Sally returns with a Polaroid instant camera.

SALLY
Not in my Cuisinart!

GARY
What? Are you gonna use it in your afterlife?
(to Sally)
Try it.

SALLY
You try it.

Gary drinks his antidote. He spits it out.

GARY
This tastes like shit!

Sally takes his picture.

GARY
What the hell are you doing?

SALLY
I want to leave something behind that says I was here.

AUDREY
I haven't left anything to say I was here either.

SAM
Leave some of the dessert.

Sally continues to take pictures randomly.

PHIL
I'll write a note for Frank explaining everything and telling him we went to the hospital.

GARY
We should go now. And stop taking those goddamned pictures.

PHIL
We should throw up first. Otherwise, we might not make it.

SAM
Oh, my God!

PHIL
Come on. We have to throw up.

SAM
How?

AUDREY
Try and remember what you look like in the morning.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Frank pulls into the driveway and gets out carrying two bottles of wine. He heads into the house. Consuela calmly wipes the dining room table.

INT. KITCHEN

Frank walks through the empty kitchen and looks into the backyard.

FRANK
Anybody here?

He sees the others are outside.

FRANK
Sorry I had to miss dinner, you guys. How was it?

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Everyone stands around wretching, trying to vomit, making horrible noises and movements.

FRANK
That good, huh?

INT. FRANK'S CAR - SHORT TIME LATER

Frank drives them all to the hospital.

SALLY
I wanted to age like Katherine Hepburn.

AUDREY
We forgot to say goodbye to the children!

SAM
We'll call from the hospital and leave a message on the machine for them.

SAM
If I die, I want to come back on a higher level.

AUDREY
Next time just come back as a person.

FRANK
Nobody's gonna die.

GARY
I think this whole thing is nuts.

FRANK
No harm in having your stomachs pumped.

They pull into the hospital emergency zone. It's the same hospital Phil and Nina went to after the arrow incident.

INT. HOSPITAL RECEPTION

Frank and Phil lead the others. They stop in front of a desk manned by the same pleasant West Indian doctor.

PHIL
We've been poisoned.

DOCTOR
Hello, Mr. Blackwell.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

Nina and Petra prepare to part.

PETRA
Do you love him?

NINA
Yes. I do.

PETRA
I'm so happy for you.

NINA
He's a very good man. I hope you can meet him. You'll like him.

PETRA
You've told him nothing about us? The family?

NINA
It would put him in danger.

PETRA
What does he think you are?

NINA
I don't know. Now go.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING AREA - NIGHT

Phil and the others stumble out toward the car.

SALLY
That was the worst experience in my life!!

AUDREY
I've never had anything that big stuck down my throat.

SAM
Complain! Complain!

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Nina enters the house and sees that it's empty.

NINA
Phillip? Hello?

INT. KITCHEN

She walks into the kitchen. Consuela cleans.

NINA
Where are the others?

Consuela shrugs. Nina picks up some of the photos Sally took. She doesn't understand. Then she finds the note that was left by Phil for Frank.

PHIL (V.O.)
Frank, we're at the hospital. Nina tried to poison us. You were right all along.

INT. BEDROOM

Nina reads Phil's notebook. As she does, the photo he took from her falls out.

PHIL (V.O.)
Who was this beautiful woman? His lover or his murderer?

Nina turns some pages and reads.

PHIL (V.O.)
He brought the letter to New York to be translated. Maybe that would give him the clue he was looking for.

She reads on, upset.

EXT. HOUSE - SHORT TIME LATER

Frank's car pulls into the driveway full of the others.

PHIL
Of course she won't come back. Unless it's to roll us for cash and jewels.

SALLY
I can't believe she'd poison us.

SAM
Was she having her period?

AUDREY
You didn't just say that.

They get out of the car. Tom, Gary's neighbor, approaches.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TOM
Gary, I want to explain something.

GARY
Not now, Tom.

TOM
No, really. I ran over your cat in my driveway this afternoon. I brought it over and I was gonna come in and say something but you guys were having dinner and I didn't want to walk in carrying a dead cat. So I just left it on your back steps. I'm really sorry.
(everyone's silent)
Look, I'm sorry! I am! I'll get you another cat. Alright?

Everyone turns and stares at Phil.

INT. PHIL AND NINA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nina's packing her few things.

NINA
You read my private letters.

PHIL
Try and understand why.

NINA
I know why. You think I am a murderer.

PHIL
I don't think that.

NINA
You said so.

PHIL
Well, I'm willing to see the other side, too.

NINA
Why did you give me this alibi? To find material for your new book?

PHIL
No. Because I loved you.

CONTINUED:

NINA
You're afraid of me.

PHIL
Fear is part of any healthy relationship.

NINA
You're afraid that I will kill you.

PHIL
No.

NINA
You never believed me.

Phil can't answer. Nina walks out of the room.

INT. HALLWAY

Phil follows her toward the back door.

PHIL
Try and understand. You won't tell me anything about yourself. It's natural that my head fills up with all kinds of crazy thoughts.

NINA
I'm going now.

PHIL
Please don't go. Give me another chance.

NINA
Will you take back the story? My alibi?

PHIL
No. I won't do that.
(beat)
I love you.

This almost stops her. But not quite. She walks out the door.

EXT. BACK YARD - NIGHT - POV PHIL

Nina carefully moves in the darkness to the thicket bordering the property. Phil watches her from the doorway.

CONTINUED:

PHIL (V.O.)
He watched her leave, part of him thinking it was the wisest thing that could happen. But another part of him already missed her.

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

Phil and Frank on the porch. Phil's upset.

PHIL
Why the hell didn't you tell me all this before?

FRANK
You weren't rational.

PHIL
How much do they know about this illegal immigrant thing?

FRANK
INS is very tight about it. But from what I can make out, the guy she killed -

PHIL
She didn't kill him!

FRANK
The guy she DIDN'T kill was smuggling people into the country. They think high level diplomats are involved.

PHIL
What do they know about Nina?

FRANK
No more than you do. They got alot of suspicions but very little evidence. The problem is that the people they smuggle in here aren't about to come forward and point fingers. They do and they get their foreign asses shipped back where they came from in a minute.

PHIL
I'll never find anybody like her again.

FRANK
Probably not.

PHIL
Thanks.

EXT. BUS - NIGHT

Nina sleeps on a New York bound bus.

INT. APARTMENT - DREAM FLASHBACK

In her flashback Nina's in the apartment in which we first saw her arrested. She argues with TWO MEN.

NINA
We cannot pay you anymore.

MAN #1
You have to.

NINA
We have no money!

The Man #2 approaches her threateningly.

MAN #1
You'll be exposed. Deported. Your whole family. Once back, they will be sent to prison.

NINA
We have no money!

Man #2 slaps her hard across her face. From another room comes Petra, screaming at them. She attacks Man #2 and he pulls a gun. It drops to the floor. Nina picks it up and screams at him to stop beating Petra. Man #1 raises his pistol to shoot Petra. Nina shoots Man #1.

Man #1 falls mortally wounded. Man #2 sees this and runs from the room. Nina looks out the window and sees a CAR double parked in the street below. She rushes from the room.

EXT. STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

Man #2 runs into the waiting car next to the DRIVER. Nina runs from the building to the car. She yells into the rear window.

NINA
Stop!

CONTINUED:

What she sees in the back seat of the car are two other men, FENCIK and a SMALL MAN sitting next to him. She holds on their faces for a moment before the car speeds away.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Phil wakes up a soundly sleeping Frank.

PHIL
Frank. Wake up. It's me. Phil.

FRANK
What time is it?

PHIL
Five o'clock. We gotta go.

FRANK
Go where?

PHIL
New York. We've gotta find Nina.

FRANK
What are you talking about?

PHIL
I made a mistake. The biggest mistake of my life. I should never have let her go. I've got to get her back.

FRANK
Slow down, will you?

PHIL
I love her, Frank. And she left me, so technically the deal is off. I can do whatever I want. Investigate her, follow her, write about her. Anything. No rules. I'm going to get her back. Any way I can.

FRANK
All this for a damn book?

PHIL
Screw the book. It's for her.
(throws Frank's clothes at him)
Get dressed.

INT. PHONE BOOTH - MORNING

Nina speaks on a payphone.

NINA
Tell my sister that I'll meet them at the funeral. She'll know what I mean.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - THE FOLLOWING MORNING

Phil sits at a table with the Owls. Phil looks at the translation of Nina's letter.

PHIL
I don't understand this part.

F.X.
What part?

PHIL
He translates this as "moving company". I don't get it.

OLIVER
What? Like the Seven Santini Brothers?

ROSE
George said it was probably a local phrase. How they might describe a family business.

MILLIE
Have some toast.

PHIL
What about this funeral she talks about? For this guy. What's his name? Grimaldi.

F.X.
I don't know. But if he died before the letter was written he must be long buried by now.

PHIL
Thanks.

Phil folds the letter and leaves.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Fencik, Petrov and Grundig talk.

FENCIK
How did she get away?

PETROV
She sneaked out during the night. No one saw her.

GRUNDIG
She's not with him any more.

FENCIK
Of course not. She's on her way to the others.

PETROV
Most likely.

FENCIK
We have to find her before she finds them. Or anyone else for that matter.

PETROV
There's a Grimaldi celebration in New Jersey. We think she may be meeting her family there.

FENCIK
You must kill her.

GRUNDIG
We will.

FENCIK
And keep a close watch on the writer. I don't want him putting his big foot in the works again.

GRUNDIG
Kill him, too?

FENCIK
Yes.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Frank and Phil walk down a busy corridor.

FRANK
It's the first big break Immigration's got in the case.

PHIL
What does he say about Nina?

FRANK
In here.

They enter an interrogation room.

INT. SMALL ROOM

A small, bare room with some chairs around a table. On the other side of the table is a young man, EMIL JEVECH. He speaks with a foreign accent. Two INS officers, COBERT and WILLIAMS, are in the room. Cobert looks at Phil.

COBERT
Who's he?

FRANK
He's okay.

Phil quickly flashes a badge to the two men. Frank is surprised by this.

FRANK
What the hell was that?

PHIL
(whispers)
Perfect attendance award. Junior high.

Frank rolls his eyes to Phil and speaks to the INS Officers apart from Emil Jevech.

FRANK
Is he talking?
(they nod yes)
What's he want for the information?

WILLIAMS
Asylum.

FRANK
What's his story?

WILLIAMS
Just what we thought. They smuggle people in under diplomatic cover.

COBERT
But it doesn't end there. From what he says, the big guys blackmail them once they get here. Threaten to turn them in unless they keep paying.

FRANK
Greedy sons of bitches, aren't they? Who's his boss?

WILLIAMS
He won't say. But it's gotta be someone pretty high up.

COBERT
Some big shot. He fingers them, he says he's dead. So he won't say anything more until he's guaranteed a new identity.

Frank turns to Jevech.

FRANK
How's the girl involved?

JEVECH
I only deliver the money.

FRANK
Who killed the embassy man?

JEVECH
I don't know.

FRANK
Where's the girl now?

JEVECH
I only deliver the money.

FRANK
(losing his patience)
Listen, asshole -

Phil stops him. He speaks to the Officers.

PHIL
Wait. Let me. I've had extensive training in persuasion technique.

Frank frowns and shrugs. Phil turns toward Jevech and smiles.

PHIL
Hi.

Jevech smiles back. Suddenly Phil grabs him by the collar violently.

PHIL
WHERE'S THE FUCKING GIRL???

Jevech spits in his face.

INT. FRANK'S OFFICE - SHORT TIME LATER

Phil and Frank in Frank's office.

FRANK
Persuasion technique. Jesus! You don't know shit about this. This is way out of your league. Stay clear of it.

PHIL
You're always on my case about how elitist my knowledge of crime is. Well, you're right. It is. But now I'm gonna start making up for it.

FRANK
This is the real thing, Phil.

PHIL
I know it is. That's the point. You and me, we'll get down and dirty.

FRANK
"Down and dirty"? Where'd you hear that?

PHIL
We'll find her together.

FRANK
This isn't even my case.

PHIL
I'll do it myself.

Phil starts to leave the office. Frank thinks better of this.

FRANK
Do what yourself? Wait a minute.

But here, F.X. and Rose arrive at Frank's office, excited.

F.X.
Phil! My friend found out about the name.

PHIL
What name?

F.X.
What he thought was a family business. It's a word used in a northern dialect.

PHIL
For what?

ROSE
A travelling circus.

PHIL
A circus?

ROSE
He said there are lots of s ll family circuses that travel all over those countries.

F.X.
It would fit that she's a gypsy.

PHIL
Of course! It's obvious! The knife, the horse, walking on her hands. She's from a circus family.

We close in on Phil's face as he puts together the things he saw Nina do.

EXT. CIRCUS TRAILER - DAY

We see an AIRSTREAM TRAILER moving along the New Jersey highway. Painted on its side is the name of a small circus and pictures of animals, trapeze artists, etc. It's part of a larger CONVOY of circus trailers.

INT. TRAILER - DAY

In the trailer are Nina's MOTHER, FATHER, BROTHER, Petra and three other Clowns. They are all in Clown Costume.

CONTINUED:

BROTHER
What if she doesn't come?

MOTHER
If your sister said she will be there, she will be there.

They're quiet as they continue dressing as clowns.

EXT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - DAY

On the MARQUEE we see RINGLING BROS. BARNUM AND BAILEY CIRCUS.

INT. DRESSING ROOMS - DAY

Phil and Frank knock on a dressing room door. The name on the door reads: FLIPPY. No response.

PHIL
Flippy. I loved this clown. The sweetest guy you ever saw. These big wide feet and this huge red nose and sad eyes. I used to come to see him every year.

FRANK
Let's go.

PHIL
Wait. I hear something.

Phil turns the handle and opens the door to the room.

INT. DRESSING ROOM

Phil and Frank enter the small room. FLIPPY, the Clown is in the process of energetically screwing a WOMAN. All we see bobbing over the back of a sofa is a red wig and huge shoes.

WOMAN
Oh, Flippy! Oh, yes! You're the king! You're the greatest!

Flippy looks over the couch and sees them.

FLIPPY
Hey, assholes! You ever hear of knocking? Close the fucking door from the outside, will you?

He throws a huge rubbery shoe at them. Phil quickly exits and closes the door behind him.

INT. CORRIDOR

Phil stands out side the door, holding the huge shoe.

FRANK
Nothing's sacred anymore, huh?

Phil angrily throws Flippy's shoe in a garbage can.

PHIL
Next year I'm going to The Ice Capades.

A SECOND CLOWN passes them.

FRANK
Hey, you.

CLOWN
(tenses)
You those collection agents?

FRANK
Police.

The Second Clown looks terrified. He spreads up against the wall ready for a frisk. He hits his head against the wall repeatedly.

CLOWN
Oh, man! I can't believe my luck! All I did was sell the shit. I swear! Less than an ounce. What kind of child support can I get out of a job like this?

FRANK
I don't know dick about your child support. You know somebody called Grimaldi?

CLOWN
You're kidding me.

PHIL
Do you know him or not?

CLOWN
Sure I know him. I know OF him.

FRANK
What do you know?

CLOWN
He's dead.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHIL
When did he die?

CLOWN
About a hundred years ago.

He laughs as Phil and Frank look at one another.

CLOWN
Grimaldi. He was the first big clown. The clown's clown. In Europe, last century.

FRANK
Why would somebody talk about him now?

PHIL
His funeral.

CLOWN
Because every year on the anniversary of his death clowns get together and have this big funeral for him. Like a celebration. You know, drink some booze, smoke a little weed, get lucky.

PHIL
We get the idea. Where?

CLOWN
All over the world.

FRANK
Where's the closest one around here?

CLOWN
Just over the bridge in Jersey. There's some two bit circus parked in Fort Lee. That's where everyone's going this year.

PHIL
When?

CLOWN
This afternoon.

INT. N.Y. APARTMENT - DAY

Fencik and the others speak to two MEN dressed in clown suits.

FENCIK
Wait in the parking lot. Yuri will come to your car and tell you how to recognize her.

The MEN nod in agreement as they put pistols in their pockets.

FENCIK
I want no mistakes this time.

GRUNDIG
We will stop her.

FENCIK
Go take care of the other two now.

INT. ROSE'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Rose, Millie, F.X. and Oliver are in the apartment. Phil's in the bathroom.

ROSE
Let me go with you, Phil.

PHIL (O.S.)
Sorry, Rose. Real police work is not like the fictional stuff I write about. It's very dangerous business.

Phil comes out of the bathroom dressed in an outrageous-looking CLOWN COSTUME.

PHIL
It isn't pretty. It's an exacting science in which everything depends on precision and detail.

MILLIE
Wait a minute. Your nose is on crooked.

PHIL
Thanks.

Phil starts to leave.

OLIVER
You're not going out in the street like that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Phil looks at himself in the hallway mirror. Beat. He puts on a pair of sunglasses and turns to them.

PHIL
I love you guys.

Rose and the others wish him good luck.

OTHERS
Good luck. ... Keep your head down! ... Did you eat something?

EXT. STREET - MINUTES LATER

Phil leaves their building and hails a passing taxi.

INT. TAXI

The CABBIE stares at him as he gets in.

PHIL
Make it fast. I'm going to a funeral.

CABBIE
Guy must've been a riot.

They take off.

EXT. FIELD AND TENT - AFTERNOON

The Grimaldi celebration is just starting. Clowns of all kinds are piling into the field.

At the entrance to the Tent a MAN dressed in a normal clothes attempts to enter. A CLOWN stops him.

CLOWN
Sorry, mister. Strict dress code.

EXT. FRANK'S BUILDING - AFTERNOON

Phil's cab pulls up in front of Frank's building.

INT. CAB

Phil searches through his pockets for his wallet.

PHIL
Where did Rose put my wallet?
Wait. Here.

He finds a small purse and opens it. He pulls out lengths of colored handkerchiefs, a rubber chicken, and finally a rubber snake springs out and scares him.

INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - SHORT TIME LATER

Frank puts white makeup on his face. He speaks to Phil who's Offscreen in the bathroom touching up his makeup.

FRANK
This is great. I look like Al Jolson. Maybe I can join a country club now. What d'you think?
(imitates straight white man)
Let's have a martini, Phil, and play a few links.

PHIL (O.S.)
The way I figure it, Nina must be meeting someone at the funeral. It's a perfect place since everybody'll be in disguise.

INT. BATHROOM

Phil reads a picture book on clowns as he touches up his makeup.

PHIL
The traditional travelling circus is really a fascinating way of life.

INT. FRANK'S ROOM

Frank continues to make up. He puts on a silly-looking hat.

FRANK
I can't believe I'm doing this. Broderick Crawford would never do this. Jack Lord would die first.
(looks in mirror)
Book him, Dano.
(shakes his head)
It's not the same.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE APARTMENT

Two MEN stand at either side of Frank's door and knock.

INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT

Frank, adjusting his hat, opens the door. As he does, the two MEN grab him and struggle. Phil's unaware of this going on.

PHIL (V.O.)
It says in the 5th Century that clowns were considered no different from witches and warlocks. Listen.

As Phil reads aloud the two Men rough up Frank.

PHIL (V.O.)
By a decree of King Alfred the Fifth of Prussia the vocation of clown -or fool - was legitimized nearly 200 years after the signing of the Proclamation of Budapest
-

Phil opens the door a crack.

PHIL
You listening? Frank?

Phil sees the fight. He tries to pull up his baggy clown pants but's grabbed by one of the Men. A fight follows. It's a ludicrous looking fight since Phil and Frank are costumed.

Frank and Phil manage to overcome the two Men. They rush down the stairs and out the door with Frank and Phil following, stalled by having to hold up their huge, baggy trousers.

EXT. STREET

The two MEN jump into a waiting car and speed off.

INT. HALLWAY

Frank and Phil catch their breaths.

FRANK
Fuck 'em. We got more important stuff to do.

PHIL
You think they were part of the whole Nina thing?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRANK
No. I think they're just two guys who break into random apartments looking for clowns to beat up.

PHIL
I think they broke my nose.

FRANK
Which one?

PHIL (O.S.)
The plastic one.

EXT. FIELD - AFTERNOON

More clowns arrive for the celebration. At the entrance we see an old car pulling the trailer that houses Nina's family and friends. It enters the field and parks. Nina's Mother, Father, Brother and Petra get out. They seem nervous, their manners in direct contrast to the smiling faces painted on them. The three other Clowns get out of their trailer, too.

FATHER
Stay together. I'll keep the photos to show her.

One of the Clowns that came with them speaks.

CLOWN
You must not show her the photos in the open. Anyone could be watching us.

EXT. BRIDGE - AFTERNOON

Frank's car pulls into a toll booth on the George Washington Bridge. Frank tosses money and misses the basket. Phil gets out to retrieve it. A WOMAN yells at him from a station wagon.

WOMAN
Would you do a trick for my little boy?

PHIL
Take a hike!

He jumps back in Frank's car and it speeds away.

EXT. FUNERAL FIELD - AFTERNOON

The celebration is in full swing now. Some clowns perform. A group meets to discuss the union.

In the parking lot we see the TWO CLOWNS who were with Fencik earlier get out of a car. They appear different from the others. The CLOWN that was with Nina's family walks to their car and gets in quickly. The other Two Clowns get in, too.

In the backseat, the Clown that was with Nina's family, pulls off his rubber mask. It's YURI, the man who was with Fencik in the back seat of the car the day of the initial killing.

INT. CAR - FLASHBACK

We see Nina staring at Fencik's and Yuri's faces.

INT. CAR IN FIELD - DAY

Yuri speaks with his Contacts.

YURI
She'll be here. Her family is looking for her. I'll be with them. You stay with me. A little behind. When I see her, I'll signal. Her father will be holding the pictures. You must kill her before she can identify me.

They get out of the car and head into the crowd of Clowns.

EXT. OTHER AREA OF FIELD

Nina walks into the field looking for her family.

As she does, a TRAMP CLOWN walks up to her, smiles and pulls a pistol from his coat. She freezes. He fires. It's a toy that fires a flag reading "bang".

EXT. FIELD

Nina's parents and their small group are a distinct contrast to the rest of the crowd. They're more quiet, tense.

BROTHER
I don't see her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

YURI
(points)
What about her?

PETRA
No.

MOTHER
Let's check inside the tent.

EXT. OTHER AREA OF FIELD

Phil and Frank screech into the parking lot and quickly get out of their car.

PHIL
I'd know her anywhere.

They stop and look at the hundreds of Clowns. Phil frowns.

FRANK
Come on.

They pass a number of Clowns juggling. As they do, one of the Clowns passes the pins to Phil who ducks from and drops them all.

PHIL
Sorry.

He hands the pins back to the frowning Clown and catches up with Frank.

INT. TENT

Nina's group scans the clowns in the tent. Closely following them are the Two Clowns in league with Yuri. They watch closely, waiting for Nina to contact the others.

It's hard for them because can't differentiate between the various Clowns. They must wait until they see Yuri's signal.

Yuri hangs close to Nina's family. From time to time he makes eye contact with the Two Heavies following them. He shakes his head as he recognizes a clown approaching them as not being Nina. The Heavies tense, readying their hidden pistols. Then they relax again.

EXT. FIELD

Phil and Frank look at the confusion of colors and people.

PHIL
I'm getting dizzy.

FRANK
This looks like the singles bar
I used to hang out in.

PHIL
That's her.

Phil grabs a WHITE FACED CLOWN from behind.

PHIL
Nina!

WHITE FACED CLOWN
(in a very deep voice)
Hey, watch the suit, will you,
pal?

The White Faced Clown tries to slug Phil, but Frank drops him with a single punch to his gut.

FRANK
(to Phil)
A mime is a terrible thing to
waste.

EXT. TENT

Nina enters the tent. But fearful of some CLOWNS at the entrance she enters by walking in on her hands.

EXT. FIELD

Phil sees Nina entering the tent.

PHIL
That's her! That's Nina! There!
Going into the tent!

FRANK
You sure?

PHIL
I'd recognize her walk anywhere!

Frank rushes to catch up with Phil who charges toward the tent.

INT. TENT ENTRANCE

The place is jammed. Phil's lost track of her. He and Frank look over the many faces. Most of the Clowns watch several Clowns prepare a HUMAN CONNONBALL act. A MIDGET CLOWN prepares to enter the barrel of a large canon.

INT. TENT - OTHER AREA

Nina's family stands in front of the Human Canonball act but really look around for Nina. Suddenly, Nina's Mother grabs her Brother's arm.

MOTHER
There she is!

Yuri spins to look at her.

YURI
Which one?

PETRA
With the yellow hat.

YURI
Are you sure?

INT. TENT - NINA

Nina at this moment recognizes them, too. She smiles but shakes her head as if to say "Don't give me away."

INT. TENT - NINA'S FAMILY

Nina's group moves slowly to meet her.

FATHER
Slowly. Don't attract attention.

Yuri nods to his Contact Clowns to follow.

INT. TENT - CANNONBALL ACT

Behind them, the Midget Clown waves to the crowd as he slides backwards into the canon barrel. But he gets stuck and another Clown pushes him in with an exaggerated effort.

INT. TENT - PHIL AND FRANK

Phil desperately looks for Nina. He thinks he spots her.

PHIL
There she is! Come on!

He heads to her but he loses her in the crowd again.

INT. TENT - NINA'S FAMILY

As they walk, Yuri continually checks that his CLOWN CONTACTS are following. They are. They ready their pistols.

INT. TENT - CANNONBALL ACT

Clowns cheer as the Midget Cannonball is finally "loaded" into the cannon. Another Clown approaches the fuse with a torch.

INT. TENT - NINA

Nina and her family meet in the middle of the tent. They greet warmly, tearfully. They kiss each other.

Yuri, hangs back from them, watching for his Contacts. They're having difficulty picking through the Clowns to reach them. They're stalled by a group of clowns performing a pyramid act.

INT. TENT - PHIL AND FRANK

Phil spots Nina and her family.

PHIL
That's her! There! With the others!

They move toward her.

INT. TENT - YURI

Yuri motions more frantically to his Contacts to hurry.

INT. TENT - NINA

Nina's Father pulls the photographs from his pocket. From these Nina is meant to recognize the two men who escaped from the apartment the day of the killing.

BROTHER
One of these men is a traitor.

CONTINUED:

FATHER
Take your time.

Nina takes the photos but a Clown bumps into her, causing her to drop them. Precious time passes as she collects the photos from the tent floor.

INT. TENT - YURI'S CONTACTS

The two Clown Contacts finally manage to push past those that were stalling them. They reach into their pockets and pull out pistols. They have plastic flowers taped to camouflage them.

INT. TENT - CANNONBALL ACT

The Clown sets about to light the cannon's fuse. The spectator Clowns cheer him on.

INT. TENT - PHIL AND FRANK

They push their way towards Nina.

PHIL
Nina!

INT. TENT - NINA

Nina recognizes Fencik in one of the photos she picks up.

NINA
Him.

BROTHER
Are you sure?

NINA
Yes.

FATHER
(to others)
Fencik.

Yuri motions to his Contacts to kill her now.

INT. TENT - PHIL AND FRANK

Phil sees Nina looking through the remaining photos. But his eye is caught by Yuri's two Contacts.

INT. YURI'S CLOWN CONTACTS - POV PHIL

One of Yuri's Clowns lifts his pistol slowly. But a CLOWN playfully jumps in his line of fire and feigns being shot.

INT. TENT - PHIL

Phil grabs Frank.

PHIL
He's gonna shoot her!

FRANK
Who is?

PHIL
That clown! He's gonna shoot her with that plastic gladiola!

INT. TENT - NINA

Nina recognizes a picture of Yuri.

NINA
Him, too.

BROTHER
You must be mistaken.

NINA
He's the second one.

MOTHER
That's Yuri.

They turn to Yuri. But he turns and screams to his Contacts.

YURI
Shoot her!!! NOW!

Nina's Brother makes an angry grab for him. Yuri turns and starts to run. The Contact raises his pistol and aims.

INT. TENT - CANNONBALL ACT

The fuse is lit and the Clown cups his hands over his ears in an exaggerated way.

INT. TENT - PHIL AND FRANK

Phil sees the Contact raises his pistol towards Nina. Phil grabs a large knife from a nearby Clown who's juggling it and throws it at the Clown with the gun.

INT. TENT - CLOWN WITH GUN

The knife thrown by Phil lands squarely in the Contact's belly. His arm drops as his pistol discharges into the ground. Phil appears amazed by his own skillful act.

INT. TENT - CANNONBALL ACT

Simultaneously, the cannon is fired and the Midget Clown soars out of the barrel to the applause of the spectator Clowns.

INT. TENT - NINA

Nina and the others look to Phil who's just thrown the knife. Phil rushes to Nina.

PHIL
Nina!

Nina's puzzled by his appearance.

NINA
Phillip?

INT. TENT - YURI

Yuri pushes his way through the crowd followed by Nina's angry Brother. The Second Clown Contact rushes away, followed by Frank who pulls his revolver.

FRANK
Freeze, Bozo!

The Clowns watching assume this is an act and they applaud and laugh. But the Second Contact knows Frank is for real and tries to get away. The other Clowns playfully try to hold him for Frank. He punches and kicks frantically. Standing alone he pulls his own pistol and aims it. Frank drops him with a single shot.

Yuri, seeing this, stops and raises his hands. Nina's brother holds him for Frank who approaches him with handcuffs.

INT. TENT - PHIL AND NINA

Phil and Nina embrace.

NINA
How did you know I was here?

PHIL
Long story.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NINA
My family?

PHIL
They're safe now. Don't worry.

Phil takes off his large red nose and he and Nina kiss passionately.

THE END